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JUNE

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YEAR

ARGOSY

Americans
After All
by Edgar Franklin

Astounding Acts That
Blazed the Path to
Patriotism

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



IVER JOHNSON

Safety
Automatic

REVOLVER

FOR years I have carried insurance on my life and home and jollied myself into thinking that this was all the protection any husband and father *could* throw around his family.

"Last night a burglar broke into my neighbor's house. IF Reynolds had only had a revolver he—

"That was enough for me! No temporizing with burglars in my home. I'm for *real* protection. I'll take this revolver I have in my hand, Mr. Clerk."

Are you ready—when the time comes—to do *your* duty by your burglar? Will you master him or will he master you? Will you give your family protection that is one jot short of *real*, full, complete protection?



IVER JOHNSON'S
ARMS & CYCLE WORKS

140 River Street Fitchburg, Mass.

99 Chambers Street, New York
717 Market Street, San Francisco

"I'll take this one—

I'm going to give my family *real* protection. No trifling with burglars in my home."

When you buy a revolver buy a *good* one. The Iver Johnson is the safest small firearm made. It is proof against accidental discharge. You can "Hammer the Hammer."

Hammer model with Regular grip \$6.75. Hammerless model with Regular grip \$7.50. Both models also made with "Perfect" Rubber or "Western" Walnut grip. Send for Free Arms Book—"A."

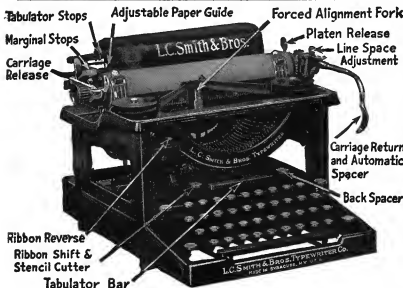
Iver Johnson Bicycles can't be beat for speed, easy riding, strength and long wearing qualities. Racing, Cushion Frame, Truss Frame Roadsters and Mobicycle models. \$35 to \$55. Juveniles, \$20 to \$25. Send for

THREE BOOKS FREE

Indicate which books you want: A—"Arms," B—"Bicycles," C—"Motorcycles."

\$40.





I want, through this advertisement, to establish as friendly business relations with you as I possibly can. I want you to realize also, that it is my earnest effort and intention to give you full honest value for every dollar that you spend with me. This is the only way I can succeed. My advertisement has appeared in this magazine continuously for more than four years.

I am building up my business on the foundation of good value and square dealings. I am saving thousands of satisfied customers thousands of dollars, by supplying, perfect—late style—visible writing—typewriters, at remarkably low prices.

All my transactions are handled throughout by personal correspondence. I assure you every courtesy and consideration, in your dealings with me. Your order will have my prompt, careful, personal attention. I will be glad to do business with you.

Harry A. Smith

ALL LATEST IMPROVEMENTS

TYPEWRITER SENSATION

Free TRIAL—Use As You Pay

Send me only \$2.50 a month until the low total price of \$48.80 is paid, and the machine is yours

This is absolutely the most generous typewriter offer ever made. Do not rent a machine when you can pay \$2.50 a month and own one. Think of it—Buying a \$100.00 machine for \$48.80. Cash price, \$45.45. Never before has anything like this been attempted.

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Perfect machines, standard size, keyboard of standard universal arrangement—universally used in teaching the touch system. The entire line of writing completely visible at all times, has the inbuilt tabulator with billing devices, the two color ribbon—with automatic reverse and key controlled shift, automatic flexible paper feed—automatic paper fingers, the back spacer—ball bearing carriage action—ball bearing shift action—ball bearing type bars—in fact, every late style feature and modern operating convenience. Comes to you with everything complete, tools, cover, operating book and instructions, ribbon, practice paper—nothing extra to buy. You cannot imagine the perfection of this beautiful reconstructed typewriter until you have seen it. I have sold several thousand of these perfect latest style L. C. Smith machines at this bargain price, and every one of these thousands of satisfied customers had this beautiful, strictly up-to-date machine on five days' free trial before deciding to buy it. I will send it to you P. O. B. Chicago for five days' free trial. It will sell itself, but if you are not satisfied that this is the greatest typewriter you ever saw, you can return it at my expense. You won't want to return it after you try it—you cannot equal this wonderful value anywhere.

You Take No Risk—Put In Your Order Now

When the typewriter arrives deposit with the express agent \$3.50 and take the machine for five days' trial. If you are convinced that it is the best typewriter you ever saw, keep it and send me \$2.50 a month until my bar gain price of \$48.80 is paid. If you don't want it, return it to the express agent, receive your \$3.50 and return the machine to me. I will pay the return express charges. This machine is guaranteed just as if you paid \$100.00 for it. It is standard. Over one hundred thousand people own and use these typewriters and think them the best ever manufactured.

The supply at this price is very limited, the price will probably be raised when my next advertisement appears, so don't delay. Fill in the coupon today—mail to me—the typewriter will be shipped promptly. There is no red tape. I employ no solicitors—no collectors—no chattel mortgage. It is simply understood that I retain title to the machine until the full \$48.80 is paid. You cannot lose. It is the greatest typewriter opportunity you will ever have. Do not send me one cent. Get the coupon in the mails today—sure.

Harry A. Smith 319-231 N. Fifth Ave. Chicago

H. A. SMITH
Room 319-231 N. Fifth Ave.
CHICAGO, ILL.

Ship me the L. C. Smith P. O. B. Chicago, as described in this advertisement. I will pay you the \$40.00 balance of the SPECIAL \$48.80 purchase price, at the rate of \$2.50 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. It is understood that I have five days in which to examine and try the typewriter. If I choose not to keep it I will carefully repack it and return it to the express agent. It is understood that you give the standard guarantee for one year.

Name

Address

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Only \$2 down brings you the brand new Rex (with 10 year's guarantee) built because world's greatest merchandise house wanted a better machine than any on market. Typewriter prices smashed! Write today for "Typewriter Secrets." Explains our startling offer. Inside facts you ought to know. Write now!

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Get one of these highest grade Underwood Visible Writers on 10 days' Free Trial. Then, Rent this UNDERWOOD—6 full months' rental payments to apply on purchase price. Or buy on easy payments. Less than 1/2 manufacturer's price. Ask for Special Offer.

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Five-Pass., 34.7 H. P. Drive and demonstrate the Bush Car. Pay for \$2 x 3 1/2 time. It out of your consciousness on sales, my agents are making money. Shipments are prompt. Bush Cars guaranteed or money back. Write at once for my 40-page catalog and all particulars. Address: 111 Bush Bros., Dept. 681, 114-inch Wheelbase. Decca Unit—Elect. 612 & 613.

BUSH MOTOR COMPANY, Bush Temple, Chicago, Ill.



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Salesmen Get the Big Pay

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THE ARGOSY

CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1917

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ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

AMERICANS AFTER ALL.....	EDGAR FRANKLIN	353
CHAPTERS I-XX		

THREE SERIAL STORIES

A SOLDIER'S HONOR In Six Parts. I....	CAPTAIN S. S. HARRINGTON	419
CHAPTERS I-V		
FACING A CRISIS. In Three Parts. II....	GEORGE C. JENKS	441
CHAPTERS V-IX (with Synopsis)		
PLAYING THE MAN. In Six Parts. IV.....	JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE	481
CHAPTERS XIV-XVII (with Synopsis)		

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

THE WOLFER.....	COURTENAY SAVAGE	410
GLAD RAGS.....	MADELEINE TWINING SHARPS	434
"IT WAS WAR".....	GEORGE M. A. CAIN	456
DAVE CRASSON'S BRONCO.....	PAUL BAILEY	493
FIGHTING THE EGG KING.....	WILSON CLAY MISSIMER	498
WHAT HAPPENED BELOW.....	HAWTHORNE DANIEL	511
THE JACKAL'S MIGHTY ROAR.....	LENIVERS CAREW	515
THE LOG-BOOK.....	THE EDITOR	524

STORIES THAT THRILL will dominate the JULY ARGOSY, ready Friday, June 15, from the Complete Novel of mysterious conspiracies—

“McPHEE'S SENSATIONAL REST”

to

“NOT QUITE BAD ENOUGH”

the South Sea Island tale of a bad man who suddenly found himself saddled with a dismaying responsibility.

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in

The Munsey Magazines

	Less Rate.	Special Combination Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$2.00	
The Argosy	1.30	
Railroad Man's Magazine	1.30	
All-Story Weekly	.75	
	\$4.85	\$4.64
		Less 3% cash discount.

August Argosy Forms Close June 14th.

"A New Force in Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SALESMEN. LOCAL. IN EVERY CITY AND COUNTY. To manage agents and canvassers; \$300 capital necessary; every one who owns a phonograph, of any make, will buy it on demonstration; a clean, legitimate money making proposition for any man who can qualify. **Wilson-Laird Phonograph Co., Inc., 136 A Liberty Street, Newark, N.J.**

AGENTS: BIG HIT OUR 5 PIECE ALUMINUM SET IS ALL THE RAGE. Cheaper than Enamel Ware. Sells like wildfire. Guaranteed twenty years. Retail value \$5.00. You sell to housewives for only \$1.98. Highest seller of the age; nine sure sales out of every ten shows. Others cleaning up \$10.00 to \$20.00 a day. Answer this quick to secure your territory. Div. DX 5, American Aluminum Mfg. Co., Lemont, Ill.

\$50 A WEEK UP. ALL THE FREE CLOTHES YOU WANT TO WEAR simply to advertise us. Write today for self-measuring blanks, style chart, big book of samples, etc. Send no money. A postal card brings all. We pay expenses on everything. **American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 602, Chicago.**

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, FURNISHING EVERYTHING; men and women, \$50.00 to \$200.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories," home or small room anywhere. No canvassing. Opportunity lifetime. Booklet free. **Bagdale Co., Drawer 99, East Orange, N. J.**

NEWEST MONEY MAKER! 11 PIECE TOILET SET selling like blades at \$1 with \$1 carrying set free. Tremendous Hit! Randall sold 30 one day. Success sure. **B. Pierce Company, 906 Lake Street, Chicago.**

FREE SAMPLE WITH PARTICULARS. NO SPLASHING WATER STRAINERS. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. **A. C. Union Filter Co., New York.**

AGENTS: Occasioneers! Transfer Initials And Monograms. You apply them on automobiles while they wait. Cost 2c each; profit \$1.33 on \$1.50 job; free particulars. **Auto Monogram Supply Co., Dept. 15, Niagara Bridge, Newark, N. J.**

AGENTS—ESTABLISH YOURSELF in a permanent well-paying business. Automobile owners everywhere have been looking for this article. **Newman's Nu-Mend** positively seals punctures automatically as fast as they occur. Guaranteed. Large profits. Write for agency. **Newman Mfg. Co. (Estab. 1882), 715 Sycamore Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.**

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AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. **Collette Mfg. Co., Department 306 B, Amsterdam, N. Y.**

NEW KNIFE SHARPENER puts razor edge on any knife instantly without grinding. Demonstration creates sensation. 30 sales a day easy. Carry right in pocket. 100 per cent profit. Write for free sample offer now. **American Products Co., 3610 Central Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio.**

PHOTO FILLOW TOPS, PORTRAITS, FRAMES, SHEET PICTURES, PHOTO CHINA PLATES. Subjects credited. Prompt shipments. Samples and catalogue free to agents. 30 days' credit. **Jas. C. Bailey Co., Desk H-1, Chicago, Ill.**

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT, made to your own measure, Free, and make \$35 to \$50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. **The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 261, Chicago.**

"WASHWHITE" Cleans Clothes Without Rubbing and without injury to the finest fabric. Seven big washings for 15 cents. Sales Guaranteed. Easy sales. Big profit. Sure repeat business. Genuine Rogers Silverware Free to your customers, and Valuable Premiums for you. Free printed matter and Sales Course. Free Samples with every order. Write for our offer. **The Naema Co., Dept. K-19, 20 W. Lake Street, Chicago.**

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS. Grab This Quick. Take orders for "Kantleak" Railroad. I paid 231 Bridge \$38.95 for one week's spare time. Cooper making \$300 monthly. Wonderful values. A dandy coat for \$2.98. Other styles to \$15.00. Four average orders a day given you \$2100 a year profit and a Free automobile. No delinquent or collecting. Complete sample outfit all Free. Big season just starting. Hurry. **Corner Mfg. Co., 123 Owen Street, Dayton, Ohio.**

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1917 SPRING SUIT FREE—A WONDERFUL AMAZING OFFER—If you are a live wire-awake man, we want you to get one of our elegant spring suits, made to your measure, absolutely free. You can make \$25 extra every week and get your own clothes without cost. Write us at once and get details of this "Startling Offer." **Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1139, Chicago.**

Armstrong Earned \$67.50 First Day selling our new business necessity. Retail \$5.00 to \$30.00. Agents profit 150%. Buyer satisfied or money back. No competition. Exclusive territory. Free sample. **Savara Co., 412 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.**

AGENTS—100% Profit. Three-In-One Shoe Brush. Polish, Quaker and Shine in one. Cleans and shines. Write quick for territory and free pocket sample. **Fountain Shoe Brush Co., 1407 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.**

SWELL SUIT FREE FOR 2 HOURS' WORK. Show it to your friends and make \$5.00 an hour in your spare time. We show how. Cost nothing to try. Write quick for measure blank and our handy sample outfit. All Free. We deliver everything free. Look into this. **Paragon Tailoring Co., Dept. 602, Chicago.**

AGENTS—\$30 A WEEK AND EXPENSES; FREE SAMPLES; gold and silver letters for store fronts, office windows and glass signs; any one can put them on; big demand everywhere; liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 409 N. Clark Street, Chicago.

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AGENTS—SOFT DRINKS IN POWDER. Just add cold water; ready instantly, delicious, healthful, every one wants them. Sells 20 glasses 25c. Trial 10 glasses 10c postpaid. **Chas. Morrissey Co., A-4417-20 Madison Street, Chicago.**

AGENTS WANTED—Agents Make \$50 Per Cent Profit selling our Auto Monograms and Initials, Window Sign Letters, Changeable Signs, and Show Cards. 1000 Varieties, Enormous Demand. **Sullivan Co., 1125 Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.**

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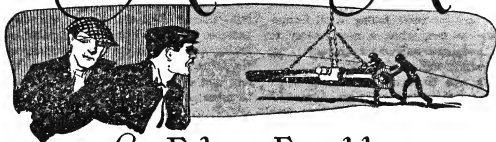
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JUNE, 1917

No. 3



Americans After All



by Edgar Franklin

Author of "A Call to Arms," "The Chase of the Concession," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

GUANAMA'S GRATITUDE.

COMING from almost any American in Guanama, the statement would have been mildly startling; coming from Edward Hemmett, so long the sturdy citizen of the United States, it was downright amazing.

"I guess I'm not an American any longer. I'm an honest-to-goodness Guanaman for the rest of my days."

Fernandez, his father-in-law, smiled the plump and placid smile of advanced

middle age and gazed from the terrace of the Edward Hemmett home.

Sloping away from the hilltop to the water's edge, the capital city of Puerto Carlo lay with its million lights.

Beyond stretched the big harbor, twinkling in the rays of the moon, rich with the little red-and-green spots that meant ships, while off on the distant north crescent-point at the harbor's mouth the huge search-light of the new fort played aimlessly up and down the skies.

"You have never taken out your

citizenship papers here, Edward?" murmured Fernandez.

"Not yet. I'll get around to it some day," yawned the president of the Hemmett-Girton Tobacco Company.

"And renounce your allegiance to the Stars and Stripes, eh?"

"What?" Hemmett started a little. "I—er—suppose so."

"One might do worse, Edward," Fernandez laughed gently. "Ours is a wonderful little country, growing more wonderful all the time. In the four years that you have been here, see what strides we have made in manufacturing! See what capital has come into Guanama! See what mighty factories have been built, to furnish clothes and shoes and shells to the incredible armies of Europe! Another decade, Edward, and among the great powers will stand Guanama!"

He nodded as he rose. Hemmett smiled indulgently in the velvet darkness. That was one small failing of all Guanamans—to feel, when a new factory or two had been built, that Guanama was the world's industrial center.

Nor was Hemmett disposed to argue the point this evening; he was lazy, with an after-dinner, purely Guanaman laziness. He wished merely to sit here on the terrace of his beautiful home and reflect upon the almighty goodness of life in general.

So that he did not even accompany his native father-in-law to the street when that gentleman made for his own exquisite mansion just across the way; he lounged farther back in his chair, gazed at his cigar, and thought.

First and last, Guanama had been good to him and to Steve Girton!

Guanama had furnished them some of the finest tobacco-land in the world, with the biggest profits. Guanama had paid the pair of them an even million dollars for the capture of Dr. Manuel Hervira, the national menace, four years back. Guanama had kept Steve as its perfect secretary of war at a very tidy salary, and had been wise in so doing.

Not to mention his other income from the country, good old Steve was like to draw down that annual twenty-five thousand for life. And Guanama had given Hemmett Carmen Fernandez for wife, which was best of all!

Mr. Hemmett, then, listened to the superb United States piano in his drawing-room and to the laughter of Edward Hemmett, Jr., aged three, and yawned gloriously. North America was all right, but South America, and Guanama in particular, was better!

Steve Girton was happy here, too, although he had not seen much of Steve lately. Girton, to be sure, lived right here in the Hemmett home, but most of his days were spent at the war office, and most of his evenings lately had been spent somewhere else.

Mr. Hemmett frowned drowsy amusement at his own lethargic mental state. Steve had mentioned dining somewhere, but—where? Not that he was worrying, because Stephen Girton was capable of taking care of himself in Guanama or anywhere else. Hemmett stretched his legs and drowsed through another hour, to rouse at the sight of Mr. Girton himself.

Or *was* Steve himself? Latterly he had been silent and preoccupied; now he seemed to vibrate and glow in the darkness! Latterly he had used many undertones; now he shouted:

"You! Ned! Wake up!"

"Eh?" cried Mr. Hemmett.

"It's happened! She's going to marry me!"

"Who's going to marry you?"

"Mercedes!" Girton's voice dropped in something like awe. "Mercedes Tesoro!"

"Is that a fact?" Hemmett was wide awake and staring at him.

"It doesn't seem possible, does it?"

"It—it may be possible," Hemmett chuckled. "If Carmen was willing to marry me, there's no real reason why the next most beautiful girl in Guanama shouldn't marry you, I suppose; but—

say, I do congratulate you, old man! Carmen 'll be tickled to death, too. She said something about you and Mercedes, and I paid little or no attention; but—well, by thunder, we *are* Guanamans now in good earnest, aren't we?"

"For the rest of our lives, I guess," muttered Mr. Girton with the strange solemnity that had come upon him.

Silence followed for a little—the heavy, comfortable silence of two men who understand each other perfectly. Hemmett was thinking pleasantly of the luck that had come to his old friend; Girton thrice started humming a little native love-song and thrice caught himself and stopped. And then, his own thoughts straying in the direction Hemmett's had taken, he mused after a time:

"It isn't a bad place to live our lives, all things considered."

"I suppose it looks more like heaven to you just now than anything else," Hemmett chuckled, "but it's not so bad at that. We had some rousing adventures here in the good old days, but things are quiet now and forevermore. Guanama's at peace with herself and the world, and if they had only reelected Ferrata president everything would be perfect."

Briefly, Stephen Girton left the rose-garden of his personal thoughts.

"How in blazes *did* they ever elect Altara, anyway?" he demanded. "Nobody ever thought the radical party had a look-in; everybody assumed that Ferrata could serve for the rest of his life. But they jammed in Altara by a hundred votes—and he'll make a rotten president!"

"He will that," Hemmett agreed. "He seems timid about his own shadow. His darned inauguration yesterday was rushed through like a wedding ceremony in an alderman's office."

"But it was just as legal and binding," Girton grinned. "A lot of those votes for him came down from Carama way, where they've built the uniform-manufacturing city."

"I know they *did*," said Hemmett,

"and a lot more came from the Ricoto neighborhood and the new factories there—and if it comes down to that, the heaviest Altara vote in any one region came from the section of this very town where the employees of the National Engine Works live. That went perfectly solid for Altara!"

And here they stared at each other in gentle astonishment until Girton smiled: "Do you suppose there's any connection between the two things? Have our various new big employers of labor been influencing their employees to vote out Ferrata?"

"I—doubt it," Hemmett said slowly. "Although this whole industrial boom is rather queer, to my mind. Almost anything queer is likely to come of it. Why, just see what is happening here at this minute, Steve! Guanama's new factories are furnishing millions of dollars' worth of supplies every month to the European armies that could be made more cheaply and bought more cheaply in the United States and carried to Europe more cheaply after they're made, and—"

"Say! That's a fact, isn't it?" cried Mr. Girton.

"Well, although I have never given it much serious thought until the last week or so, it is unquestionably a fact. I've been so infernally busy with the tobacco business that I've never considered the matter until very recently; but it is a fact that certain European nations are paying more than they need to for the stuff made here! Why?"

"Well, for that matter, why did all the money flow in and why did all the factories start up at about the same time? It all began two years ago."

"It all began about the time that certain of our senators decided that Guanama needed a big navy, and jammed through the proposition in the face of all kinds of opposition!" Girton spoke suddenly, and second by second the languor of recent months left his countenance, just as it was leaving Hemmett's. "It all began about the time that Canita, the

confounded pacifist, went up in the air and decided that the harbor here needed a fort big enough to defend two Panama Canals—and jammed it through the senate, too! In fact, the whole business, now that I think of it, seemed to begin at once!"

A long half-minute they gazed at each other through the gloom.

"Stephen," said Hemmett, "have we been suffering from the native tendency to hookworm of late years? Has somebody been putting over something that got by us altogether?"

"I've been wondering that, without mentioning it, ever since I realized that Altara had been elected without a reason in the world for electing him!"

"And so have I, Steve, more particularly since the infernal radical party got a majority in the senate as well as a president! And what's more— Oh, bosh! There's nothing to it, I suppose!"

Girton laughed shortly.

"It's queer, all the same!" he persisted. "So are all the factories, cropping up so suddenly! So is the National Engine Works, with what must be seventy or eighty million dollars' worth of capital at least! What is the concern, anyway?"

"Ostensibly, a mighty corporation, partly native, organized for the purpose of turning out the most perfect form of turbine engine. They *must* mean business, Steve! They've bought up hundreds of acres out there on the point opposite the fort, and paid tremendous prices for the land. They're employing thousands of men and—"

"Yes, and why are they walled off? Why have they a fifteen-foot fence about the whole place, with guards at every gate? Why is every man in the shops sworn to secrecy?"

"Because," Hemmett said mildly, "they're manufacturing an engine on a device that is still a dead secret because patents have not yet been issued in several countries. That isn't necessarily criminal even if it is a bit odd. But—"

He broke off suddenly, for his native butler was at his elbow.

"A messenger, señor, for the Señor Girton. He wishes to see Señor Girton himself."

"Send him here," that gentleman said briefly.

The man departed, to return with another native of Guanama some thirty seconds later. The visitor was a stranger, small and slim, and immaculate in his linens; he proceeded straight to Girton and, smiling and bowing, extended an envelope.

"From the Señor Altara, our president, señor," he purred. "If there should be an answer, I will convey it."

He backed away, while Girton, whistling softly, switched on one of the electric lights set in the little tropical-fern jar at his elbow. Whistling still, he ripped the envelope and drew out the official sheet, and he it said that he even continued to whistle as he read—and then stopped whistling.

"What!" exclaimed Stephen Girton.

"What is it?" Hemmett asked quickly.

Another ten seconds Girton gave to a rereading of the document before he looked up angrily.

"Well, it is a more or less courteous little note firing the secretary of war!" he stated. "I'm bounced!"

CHAPTER II.

MONEY! MONEY!

GLANCING through history, one finds many secretaries of war who have been dismissed without undue excitement; for all that we learn to the contrary, most of them took it calmly enough—but as it chanced Steve Girton had formed for Guanama the only real army that country had ever owned. By hard, persistent work he had welded straggling individuals, straggling units, into as compact a little fighting force as the heart could wish!

When he appeared on the street people

cheered the passing of Girton's official automobile; periodically the papers had lauded him, and resolutions had been passed commending his work; invariably his lightest wish had been respected by Guanama's lawmakers—and he was human.

"There is an answer, señor?" asked the messenger.

"You bet there's an answer!" the retired secretary of war cried. "You tell your rat-faced little president to go to the devil and find some one else who'll give—"

"Steve!" Hemmett cut in sharply.

"It may not be dignified, but I've ceased to be an official, and I don't have to be dignified!" Girton snapped. "I'm not in love with myself, but I know what I've done with this army business! If I'd been asked to resign in the usual way, I'd have called it politics and resigned and charged it up to the justly celebrated ingratitude of republics. But this thing's simply a statement that I am dismissed and that my tenure of office comes to an end when I've read this letter."

"Altara himself wrote that?" Hemmett cried in amazement.

"With his own hand. I have seen it, señor," the messenger broke in placidly.

Stephen Girton looked him up and down.

"You go back and tell him that I've resigned," he said bitterly. "And if you want to go by the door instead of being kicked over the edge of this terrace, go quick! I don't like your face, and I'm mad!"

The little white-clad man vanished.

Hemmett laughed annoyedly. "That was childish, Steve."

"Maybe so," snorted the ex-secretary. "It wasn't the job itself. We have plenty of money; you know that. It was the idea of the thing and the way he did it and the infernal thanklessness of the whole proposition, and—and—its queerness!"

Hemmett nodded.

"That's what impressed me first," he

said. "Only yesterday the *Novedades* had an editorial on the possibility of a new cabinet, and mentioned the impossibility of getting a secretary of war in Guanama who could even continue your work and—"

Once more he stopped, for once more his little butler was approaching.

"The Señor Enrico Ricoro!" he announced. "To see you both, señores!"

Together, Girton and Hemmett gazed at the butler.

"The—the rich Ricoro?" the latter asked. "The tobacco Ricoro?"

"The same, señor."

"Send him out here, then," Hemmett directed, and, when they were alone again, directed a puzzled little smile at his old friend. "That's about the queerest thing of the day, isn't it—this call? I supposed that Ricoro was in the deadly enemy class?"

"He has been ever since the mess when we tried to merge his tobacco interests with ours," Girton muttered. "It can't be two weeks ago that he gave out an interview to the effect that the Ricoro combine would never touch—Psst!"

Ricoro was with them—not the ugly, grunting little Guanaman millionaire of the past, with every penny of his wealth tied up in tobacco-leaves, and his ego swollen to several times its normal size, but an oily, bowing person who beamed pleasure unutterable!

He held out his hands, and Girton and Hemmett shook them wonderingly. He drew up another of the wicker chairs and proffered his case of really remarkable cigars. He rubbed his hands happily and lunged into the business of the moment—itsself an unusual performance in Guanaman commercial circles, which savor of the Orient in most things.

"You are astonish that I come?" he chuckled. "*Pero*—one makes mistakes—yes? I have been in some things foolish. It is to forgive—no?"

"Consider yourself forgiven, Ricoro," Hemmett said curiously. "Pardon me,

is this just a social call or a business visit?"

"Both, if you will permit, since I have come to your home, señor," Ricoro said, his engaging smile growing even broader. "To sit here on your terrace and survey our city—it is wonderful! To speak at the same time of pleasant little business matters—that is better yet! No?"

"I should say that it might depend on the business matters."

"Of a certainty!" chuckled the amiable gentleman. "And these, señores, I think you will find pleasant. I come, with your permission, to buy of you the extensive tobacco interests so ably conducted by yourselves."

"To buy them?"

"For cash, señor!" Ricoro went on smoothly. "Why fence, señores? You know, I know, that the plantations have cost you perhaps one million and a half dollars United States."

"And they've been paying dandy interest on two millions!" said Girton.

"And for that reason, señor, I come to pay you, here and now, in cold cash, as you say, two millions and a quarter!" said the surprising Ricoro. "Shall we have the papers drawn this evening and conclude the deal, or may I call in the morning?"

An explosion of dynamite in the center of the terrace might have startled them a little more, but very little! This was Ricoro, absolutely tobacco-poor as regarded ready cash; this was Ricoro, who had scorned their own splendid holdings not two years ago!

Steve Girton kicked Hemmett's foot in the darkness.

Mr. Hemmett said simply: "Nix!"

"I do not comprehend, señor?" Ricoro inquired.

"It's a nice offer, but I don't think we'll accept it. For one thing, you are not talking actual spot-cash."

"But señor!" cried Ricoro. "Before ten in the morning, at the National Bank of Guanama, the money shall be handed to you in gold, if you wish!"

"Aha? And for another thing, we don't care to sell. Tobacco-land here is more valuable than ever, and when the tariff in the United States has had a few more changes it's going to be more valuable still."

"The offer is not enough?"

"Not nearly."

"Two millions and one-half!" said Ricoro.

"Yes, but what's the idea of it?" Girton rasped. "Has somebody found gold on the plantations, or is tobacco going to join the high-cost-of-living performers in some way we don't suspect? What is it?"

"It is simply that, having prospered, I wish to increase my holdings, señor."

After which Ricoro waited silently, giving them the vague impression that his feelings had been wounded, while Hemmett and Girton conversed in that wordless telepathic fashion that comes now and then to men who have known and understood each other through many long, trying years.

Ricoro was seeking, of course, to give the affair the aspect of an ordinary big business proposition. Yet an intelligent ten-year-old boy, conversant with Guanama affairs, must have known that it was—well, something else.

A clairvoyant might have been able to delve into Ricoro's brain and find the answer; for themselves the certainty remained that if their holdings were worth two and one-half millions to Ricoro they held the same value for Hemmett and Girton.

"You've sprung it suddenly, and at first glance it looks good, Ricoro," said Hemmett. "But we're not trust magnates, and we're not used to slinging millions around like cigars. I'm frank to say that if you offered three millions we should not accept this evening. But when we've had a week to think it over—"

"But a week, señor!"

"Well? Why not?"

The native drew a deep, disappointed breath.

"As the excellent señor says, why not?" he echoed. "Still, I had hoped to close this evening. It is a handsome offer, señor!"

"It's so darned handsome that it makes one suspicious," Girton smiled with utter candor. "There's something so seductively lovely about it that we wouldn't close if you had a truck of gold in the street. That's because we've lived years in Guanama."

"It is final, señor?"

"For this evening, at any rate."

"But after this evening—" slipped from the remarkable millionaire as he bounced to his feet and shrugged his shoulders disgustedly—and as quickly smiled again.

"What about this evening?" Hemmett asked sharply. "Why is this evening the particular one to pay crazy prices for tobacco?"

Ricoro, spreading his palms deprecatingly before them, retreated behind his bland smile. It is a trick peculiarly Guanaman and bafflingly Chinese. It means anything in the world or nothing at all.

In this case it seemed to indicate that both of them were unduly suspicious of an inoffensive millionaire whose sole desire was to make them richer; and when the smile had persisted long enough to convince them that Ricoro was done talking business he made a few perfunctory remarks about nothing in particular and took his leave.

Down the street they heard the hum of his departing motor. Mr. Hemmett's grin was quizzical as he asked:

"What in blazes do you make of it, Steve?"

"Nothing at all, unless some overwhelming trust is coming down here to buy in all the tobacco of the country, and Ricoro's heard of it and borrowed enough to corner the supply before they get here."

"But he couldn't borrow two and a half millions in one lump."

"I know that," mused Mr. Girton,

"and by the same token you and I know the country very well, and I doubt if there's one man beside your esteemed father-in-law able to hand out that sum in cash."

Through perhaps two minutes they smoked and pondered.

"There's something behind that offer," Hemmett announced. "Something or other that has no immediate connection with the tobacco business."

"Eh?"

"Sounds silly, but it isn't, Steve. It's the result of living so long in Guanama, I suppose, and having thought about that queer election and the other queer things this evening. There's a reason for everything that happens in this little old world, my boy, and there's no visible reason for anybody wanting to take over our tobacco-land at fifty or sixty per cent more than it's actually worth. Hence, the reason's invisible at the moment."

Steve Girton, late secretary of war, leaned back in his chair and chuckled a little.

Hemmett might be bristling with suspicion of an affair he could not quite understand, but Girton did not bristle at all. Not one hour back Stephen had become engaged to the most adorable girl in the entire universe, and when one is in just that state it is rather hard to bristle at intangible things.

"I think you're all off, Ned," he said quietly enough. "I think Ricoro has a brain-storm of some kind, and believes that Guanama is about to monopolize the earth's tobacco market. What he has actually done is to form a little group of wealthy men, make up a pool of two millions and a half and—"

His voice trailed off. For the third time in a few minutes Hemmett's little butler was with them.

"Mr. William Jones!" he announced this time. "Again to see you both, señores."

"Jones!" Hemmett echoed rather loudly. "What Jones?"

"Hush!" Girton said quietly. "That's

the mystery Jones, Ned—must be, for his name's William! That's the chap who landed last month and has been living on a whole floor of the new hotel ever since—the fellow that rides around in the big white car he brought here with him."

"I've heard of him. What on earth does he want of us?"

"Why not have him here and find out?" Girtton laughed.

Mr. Jones's form appeared in the lighted doorway and moved toward them. Hemmett switched on another light or two and examined Jones as they shook hands.

Very well dressed, very conventional of feature, he might have been anything from a prosperous small tradesman to the head of a corporation. He seemed to have the faculty of looking like absolutely no definite type, and in a crowd, it occurred to Girtton, one would have passed him fifty times without knowing he existed.

Yet there was a queer, assured ring to his voice as he said:

"Gentlemen, the pleasure of making your acquaintance is very great. I bring you news!"

"News?" Hemmett said.

"News, indeed," smiled Mr. Jones. "You, both of you, are about to leave Guanama!"

CHAPTER III.

JONES PROPOSES.

ON the face of the thing, the mysterious Mr. Jones was mildly demented. That was the one explanation capable of holding water. Fifteen seconds back he had not known them; now, in the most ridiculously confident fashion, he was ushering them out of the Guanama they had done so much to make.

What was more, having delivered himself, he bowed and dropped into a chair and laughed quite happily, so that—yes, he was mad, fast enough!

"Did I—er—understand you to say—" Hemmett began wonderingly.

"That you were about to leave Guanama? You did, Mr. Hemmett," Jones laughed. "You will leave, I think, on the steamer that sails at one to-morrow."

"Just to please you, Mr. Jones?" Girtton asked amusedly.

"To please me and because it will be to your considerable advantage," said the caller, his smile fading. "I have come with a business proposition, gentlemen, which I believe you will find yourselves unable to reject."

"It seems to be quite an evening for business propositions," Hemmett muttered.

Jones, apparently, did not understand—nor did he waste time with questions. He smiled polite inquiry at Mr. Hemmett for an instant and then leaned forward earnestly.

"I've astonished a good many people in my time, gentlemen, and I expect to astonish you," said he. "However, it is your own fault. You two gentlemen have piled up quite a reputation in the past as engineers and railroad builders, and down here you've piled up another as executives of the highest order. That sort of executive, as you very well know, is beyond price these days—back home!"

"In the United States?"

"I referred to it as *your* home, of course," Jones pursued, with an odd, flitting little smile. "You have followed big business developments back there, I take it? But you have, naturally. And still," said Mr. Jones, "you haven't heard of the biggest one of recent years—I refer to *the* railroad development?"

Head thrust forward, the peculiar gentleman narrowed his eyes and studied them intently for three seconds, finally leaning back with a contented little sigh.

"I see that you have not," he went on. "So much the better. It's the blackest kind of secret, you know, but you two have the name down here of knowing everything in the world, and I almost feared—but that's nonsense, of course!"

"Mr. Girton—Mr. Hemmett! The greatest railroad system in the United States is about to be built—a new system, going into new territory, with new rails and new bridges and new rolling stock, with new methods of management and new methods of operating!"

"It will be, when finally worked out, the greatest single feat in the history of railroading. That is *absolutely* every detail that I can give you at the moment. Not another explanatory word can be spoken until you are established in New York."

He snapped his fingers quite excitedly. Girton leaned forward.

"Say, what the devil are you talking about?" he asked.

"I have done talking about the thing itself," Jones smiled. "I have come to the point. We want two men at the head of the construction, and we have combed the world for them. I believe that I have found them. Gentlemen, I offer you each a post, with a ten-years' contract, at a salary of one hundred thousand dollars annually!"

"Hey?" Hemmett shouted.

"The first year's salary to be paid to-morrow morning, and yourselves to sail for New York on to-morrow's steamer!"

"But we can't—"

"But you can't afford to do anything else!" Jones said suavely. "Your duties, for three months at least, will be essentially nothing. You will find offices in the city, and those in charge will assign you to your own quarters and give you every particular that I am forbidden to give. Gentlemen—you accept?"

Mr. Hemmett cleared his throat with some effort.

"If we were the brand of gentlemen who can be carried off their feet, we'd accept," he said. "We're not! We have considerable property here, and—"

"I am quite certain that it can be disposed of to advantage. I would almost guarantee to take care of that!"

"And our home is here," Hemmett went on irritably. "We belong in Gua-

nama, man, and— Who the dickens are you, anyway?"

"Well, my name is Jones, and I'm a plain citizen employed by big interests," the gentleman said simply. "My father was an Englishman and my mother German; I've got a French grandmother, and I was born in Kansas City, spent part of my boyhood in London, and gathered parts of my education and business experience in Berlin and Paris. Is that answer enough?"

"It's a little confusing, but it 'll do," Girton answered dryly. "Now tell us the reasons for the secrecy, Jones, about the railroad."

"That I am simply forbidden to do. Can you start to-morrow?"

The late secretary of war tried to catch the eye of his old friend; Jones was between them. It was a mighty offer—a staggering offer! Yet, with its glittering gold, it twanged so strongly on the string Ricoro had set vibrating that suspicion welled up in Girton.

"No, we can't leave to-morrow!" Hemmett said sharply. "And we can't accept a thing about which we know absolutely nothing or—"

"Can you accept it at a salary of one hundred and twenty-five thousand?"

"What? Why—er—no!" Hemmett stammered.

"Can you accept it at a salary of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars?" asked Mr. Jones. "The money to be paid in advance to-morrow morning. Think!"

It was the very thing they were trying to do, and a difficult thing when one looked at Jones, utterly calm, utterly commonplace, talking like a lunatic, and still looking as if he meant just what he said.

Covertly, Edward Hemmett gripped the arms of his chair; when he spoke, it was something like a man speaking in a dream.

"A—a matter of this kind can't be closed in one minute," he stated with conviction. "It's so overwhelming that

it sounds—er—a trifle crazy, Jones! We'll consider it for a few days, and then—"

"That's just what you'll not do, Mr. Hemmett," Jones assured him swiftly. "This thing demands an immediate answer, because you're starting to-morrow, I tell you! Why, what ails you, man? Don't you understand the figures I'm offering? Can't you see that for ten years you're acquiring the equivalent of another three millions apiece at five per cent? I hadn't an idea that you'd even hesitate, gentlemen, far less—"

"Well, you have an idea now that I'm hesitating!" Hemmett said dizzily. "A man can't readjust his whole life in fifteen seconds just because some one comes around and tries to hand him the national treasury. We'll—"

"Hemmett," cut in Mr. Jones, "I offer you two hundred thousand dollars apiece. That's the limit I'm empowered to go, and that settles it! Will you be ready to sail?"

Hemmett shut his teeth. Stephen Girton did one of the most remarkable things of his lifetime, for he stepped forward and tapped Mr. Jones's arm and looked at Mr. Jones much as if that gentleman had sought to pick his pocket.

"If you want an answer, yes or no, on the spot, the answer is no!" he said sternly. "We will not accept and we will not sail! You may be a maniac, or you may be trying to hand us something that is simply beyond human understanding at present, but that doesn't affect the answer. The answer is *no*!"

And now, if Mr. Jones had astounded them, it seemed that Mr. Jones himself was astounded! His jaw dropped and his eyes opened incredulously; he squinted at Stephen Girton and his voice dropped.

"If there's any little deficiency in the mental stuff, it's yours!" he said unexpectedly. "Once in a while a man is offered something so good that he's bound to take it blindfolded and thank his stars it came his way. That's what I'm

offering you, and—bosh! You're not refusing!"

"Oh, we're refusing, fast enough!" Hemmett contributed. "Not definitely, perhaps, but until we've had time to consider."

"That's impossible! You accept to-night and sail to-morrow—or it's off!"

"Then it's off!" retorted Mr. Girton, and would have liked to clasp his brow.

Over William Jones came the strangest of changes. Where he had smiled, he sneered; where he had been amiable and commonplace, hard lines appeared suddenly and gave him an indefinable, evil, threatening aspect; where there had been little or no character, there was a quantity of very unpleasant character. In two seconds the man had become a personality, and a very disturbing one!

"I refuse to believe that that's final!" said he.

"It is final!" said Mr. Girton.

"You're turning down four hundred thousand dollars a year between you, rather than make up your minds to pull up stakes in this God-forsaken spot?"

"We seem to be doing just that."

"It's the most unwise thing you ever did, Mr. Girton."

"Is it?"

"It is!" the new Jones said curtly. "Will you be good enough to remember that *I told you that*? Will you phone me if you change your minds before morning? You will? Very well, gentlemen! Good night! And think it over, gentlemen! *Think it over!*"

CHAPTER IV.

RIFLE BORING.

GIRTON, at the edge of the terrace, watched the white motor coast down-hill. Then he turned back to his old friend with a confused smile.

"Just about five minutes more of Mr. Jones, and they'd have taken me to the new Puerto Carlo asylum," said he. "Was it real?"

Hemmett faced him steadily.

"Maybe it was the realest thing that has happened to us in Guanama!" he replied.

"What's that?"

"There's something big behind it—just as there was something big behind that offer of Ricoro's, Steve! No one man, no one concern, is strewing money around in millions like that! I'm not exaggerating our own importance, but we're a certain power in this country—and I've been thinking harder in the last two minutes than I've thought in four years! *The object of this evening's little lunatic game is to get us out of Guanama!*"

"Do you believe it?" Mr. Girton asked, sitting down quite suddenly.

"I believe more than that! Why should those two propositions have been hurled at us that way, if they wanted anything else? Any two ordinary men would have fallen for both of 'em, Steve! If we closed with Ricoro and closed with Jones, and the money was real, we'd have nothing to do but retire to New York, buy up Central Park, and build a home in the middle—and there's something big behind it!"

"You said that before!"

"And I'll keep on saying it until I find the answer," Hemmett assured him. "And here's another point that has been coming up in my mind. The factories—the National Engine Works—all the money that has come into Guanama in the last two years. Do you realize that almost every penny of it has come from *one European nation?*"

His eyes snapped. Beneath the tropical tan long since acquired, blood was surging up—nor did Girton remain unaffected. The recent dizziness returned to Mr. Girton, and he stammered:

"You—you've got the darnedest imagination—"

"Possibly. But the thing that appeals to me is that, in all common sense, a nation, and only a nation, can spend money like that; and the nation that has

been spending millions on millions in Guanama—"

"Wants us to get out?"

"Yes!"

And here, since the matter had ascended—or descended—to the purely ridiculous, Girton threw back his head and laughed suddenly. He caught Hemmett's frown, and laughed the harder. He even slapped his knee and rocked for a little, and he ended with a wheeze.

"Well, it's a funny notion, anyway!" he remarked.

"You think there's nothing in it?" asked the unsmiling Hemmett.

"I have a glorious opinion of you, and another of myself, but I refuse to believe that a great European nation wants us to move to New York, Ned—yes."

Mr. Hemmett rose with a dry smile.

"Just the same, we'll step across the street and have a guarded little talk with father-in-law," said he.

"About all of this?"

"Not necessarily. Fernandez is a Guanaman, with all the national characteristics. I've no idea of telling just what has happened and having him form his own theories and chatter about them to every other capitalist he meets for the next month—but it does happen once in a while that, by careful sounding, Papa Fernandez can be made to drop a helpful little hint or two, Steve. I've had more than one clue to a peculiar situation from his lips and—come along."

Silently he led the way across to the magnificent Fernandez home—and Stephen's merriment died out within him. For one thing, he could find no tenable answer to the double riddle; for another, Ned Hemmett had a disconcerting way of being absolutely right just when one fancied that imagination had carried him away—and at the doorway Hemmett was turning to his friend and saying gravely:

"Let me do the talking, Steve. If he knows what's afoot, he'll drop a clue!"

They found Fernandez in his library, a room magnificent as all the others, but

rather cluttered just now with hunting paraphernalia. This was the season when, of late years, Fernandez had been taking to the mountains for a week in quest of some of the reasonably big game to be found there. A high-powered rifle-barrel lay across his desk, and he smiled at them over it.

"Ah, Edward? The boy in bed?" he said.

"Not yet, I believe. He hadn't come to kiss me good night when I left," Hemmett said rather lazily. "That's the thirty gun, isn't it?"

"That is the thirty, Edward—the one Pedro almost ruined last year. Look through her now."

He offered the rifle-barrel, and Hemmett held it to the light and squinted through.

"Rebored, eh? Nice, clean job, too," he said. "I didn't know you'd sent it."

"This afternoon," smiled Fernandez.

"That's when it came back, eh? It takes a good while—a job like that. It can't be done outside the good old State of Connecticut."

"I sent it this afternoon, and it came back this afternoon," Fernandez corrected amazingly.

"That wasn't rebored in *Guanama*?"

"But of a certainty, Edward! Is that so astonishing? We have a gunsmith in town now, Pedro tells me. A nice job—a very nice job!"

He patted the barrel, which was well, for he could not see the color flowing from Hemmett's cheeks during that minute which followed. Girton was doing some staring of his own, too—and now, with a jerk, Hemmett was himself again, and, however brief the call, he was moving toward the door!

"Well, I just dropped in to see if Carmen had left that second volume of 'Jean Christophe' over here," he said in a slightly strained voice, "and I remember now that it's on my desk. You're not starting to-morrow?"

"The day after, Edward. Will you not sit and smoke?"

"Not now, thanks. There's—er—something in that book I want to show Steve. Good night."

Not to the entrance of the house, but straight down the corridor to the rear, he led Steve Girton; and there he clutched his arm and all but hissed:

"Did you get it?"

"You think the job was done in a regulation gun factory?"

"It couldn't have been done anywhere else in the world, Steve! *We've got a secret gun factory in Puerto Carlo, and a dandy!* And yet, ostensibly, you can hardly have a hammer repaired in this town—and this is no crazy secret factory of the Guanaman government, either, because we don't need one. We have nineteen thousand more rifles than we have men, and— Here, you! Is Pedro in the house?"

The dark-skinned native maid bobbed her head and hurried off. Mr. Hemmett, with another of this evening's efforts, straightened up and shed some of his outward excitement; he had all but accomplished his lazy smile when the dapper little native servant appeared.

"That gun of Señor Fernandez, Pedro!" Hemmett said. "Where did you have it fixed? I've got one that I want rebored."

"The gun, señor? But yes!" came in liquid Spanish. "I took it to my cousin, Agustín Zaro, señor, who labors in the National Engine Works. He it was who did the work."

"In the—National Engine Works?" Hemmett demanded.

"Yes, señor, but—as to the other, the gun of yourself, señor, I do not know. There was trouble of a sort about this one, I think. I gave no heed to the mouthings of Agustín, for he has ever been a silly fellow, señor, but there was trouble about his having done the work. Still—I will inquire, señor. For a dollar or two, perhaps, it can be accomplished."

"Well, don't—don't bother if it is likely to make trouble for your cousin," Hemmett answered in a husky voice that

tried hard to be careless. "That's all, Pedro!"

The man glided away. Breathing hard, Hemmett led the way back to the terrace of his own beautiful home; and now it was no amused Girton that he faced.

"Was it all imagination, Steve?" Hemmett asked. "Is there something afoot in this town and this country that has gone clear over our heads? Does the presence of an arms factory, practically owned by that European nation, mean anything?"

"Anything or nothing, perhaps, but—"

"And our new navy, Steve!" Hemmett went on almost wildly, as fact after fact rose up before him in the illumination of this startling evening. "The new battle cruiser *Almiranta* out there in the harbor—why do they object to people going aboard her? Why is that boat—and others of the new boats—supposedly bought as second-hand junk, so infernally modern as to lines? Why—"

"Why is all of it?" Girton laughed shortly. "I don't know, but I do know this: it's time to have a look at the National Engine Works at close range!"

"Can we manage it?"

"Can any one stop us if we sneak down there at night—to-night, even?" the late secretary of war asked. "You know—I'm not exaggerating the thing—yet. But if any European nation is establishing a base of armament here, with the United States just a little way north, Ned—"

It was too absurd, perhaps. He could not say it!

"The old Monroe Doctrine's in a fair way to be blown into a million pieces!" finished Hemmett for him thickly.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE NIGHT.

THERE in the darkness, utterly peaceful, surrounded by every manifestation of civilization and wealth and placid prosperity, Girton and Hem-

mett stood aghast. Seconds passed before Girton was capable of:

"It's not impossible! Guanama owes too much to the United States to sell her out like that! Such a thing couldn't be carried on secretly, and—"

"It has been, so far; and here's another point: look at the way prominent Americans have been getting out lately! Carter had an offer from New York; a native combine bought out Donaldson's business, and he went back to Chicago with the whole force; Britt traded his interests for others in Panama, and made fifty thousand dollars; and Dixon's gone, and Morton, and Fowler!"

"And we're here."

"Yes, we're here, and—I'm beginning to think that we're not Guanamans!" Hemmett's voice thickened suddenly and shook a little. "I'm beginning to think that we're Americans, after all, Steve, because the very thought of what this forlorn little hole of a country is trying to put over on the United States makes me so damned furious—"

He caught himself, but there was another breathing hard just beside him. Stephen Girton would have spoken several seconds sooner but for the peculiar clogging of his throat. When he did speak it was very quietly:

"We'll go and see the National Engine Works now!" he said grimly.

One disadvantage of popularity is that one doesn't wander about without attracting attention. To step from Hemmett's home to the motor would have been simple—and conspicuous.

They conferred very briefly on this point, and made their decision; and each of them thrilled a little, for stealing out in the old khaki, taking back streets and back roads to the National Engine Works savored strongly of the good old days before prosperity came, when the blood moved fast, and one's wits, now and then, were all that stood between one and the hereafter!

Carmen Hemmett, fortunately enough, for she did not approve of adventure that

involved her husband, was occupied with callers of her own. The chatter of girls, the tinkle of the piano, came from the drawing-room when Hemmett, shabby in the clothes of their engineering days and with his automatic pistol in his pocket for the first time in months, stole down the back stairs to wait for Steve Girton. He had kissed his beloved boy good night and—yes, be it admitted that Mr. Hemmett felt a bit odd.

He was coming back in an hour or two, of course. And really nothing would happen. And, now that the first shock had passed, he half expected to find that they had been making a mountain-range out of an undersized mole-hill. They would discover that the National Engine Works was harmless, and— He turned to Girton.

"Ready?" he asked. "We'll go out the back way, around Fernandez's, and down the alley behind the garages; once we're down the hill it'll be easy enough to keep in the dark spots."

"Right!" said Girton, whose jaw was set. "It's understood that we're going into that engine works before we quit?"

"I think it is."

"March!" said the retired secretary of war.

Side by side, closing the door very softly, they stepped into the gloom. Side by side they hurried past Fernandez's home, with its soft lights and its marble reaches, and then down-hill into the less opulent quarters of Puerto Carlo. And it was gratifying to note that in their old togs they drew little attention from the casual night prowler; they were, to all intents, adventurous derelicts of the type which drifted into Guanama often enough and drifted out again.

Now they had passed the town altogether and were on the barren stretch, destined some day to be an attractive suburb, that lay between the outskirts of Puerto Carlo and the bulk of the National Engine Works, looming big and black at the end of the wretched dirt road.

Four keen eyes peered through the pitchy blackness, as they trudged along, and could see nothing. Puerto Carlo wasted no electricity in this section, but there were weird tales of sentries who shooed the general public from the vast factory, shooting before they hailed. The tales were the product of the native mind, of course, but—

"Halt!" said a voice directly in their path.

Its owner had come from nowhere, but he was there and with a flash-light and a rifle. More, he seemed puzzled as the light flared into their faces. His voice grew respectful.

"It is not permitted to pass this point, señores."

"We—"

"It is not permitted to pass this point, señor! I have strict orders."

Unfortunate was it for the unknown that Edward Hemmett had been meditating hotly these last minutes upon the trick Guanama seemed about to play on his own United States.

There was a swish, and the flash-light went into the air, to shine upon the grass a dozen yards away. There was a thud and a stifled yell, and then not a sound until:

"Did you knock him out?" Girton asked interestedly.

"I think so. I have him here, and he's limp," Hemmett announced from the ground. "I'm tying his hands with the handkerchief from my neck. Jam yours down his beastly throat and make it fast, Steve. That's the talk! Has he a belt? Made of rope, eh? So much the better. This'll do for his legs."

It was well for their reputations that no arc lamp shone upon their feat. Three minutes more and an unconscious man was lying with his closed eyes to the stars, gagged and bound—and the march to the National Engine Works was on again, silently as before and a little more grim because the stories of exaggerated precaution had been true and the significance was sinister.

Their eyes peered the more keenly and their steps grew light and cautious as they came to within a bare fifty yards of the towering wooden fence that enclosed the works.

Behind that fence wide-awake men were moving about, for the sound of voices came distinctly through the night. Machinery of some sort was running, too, at a considerable distance. And over there was a little gateway in the boarding, for they could see a faint rectangular outline of light, and past it, back and forth, a sentry paced.

"Not that gate for us!" breathed Hemmett. "We'll sneak along this way and look for another. I wonder if we dare go any closer?"

"We'll have to," Girton whispered. "We—look over there! There's another entrance, Ned!"

There was at least another outlined rectangle, and before this one no figure moved. Reaching it meant stealing along for three hundred feet and then advancing directly upon the gate; and if the sentry in this case chanced to be beside the gate and alert, the expedition had reached its end.

Still, now that they were within sixty or seventy feet, no hail had come. They crouched and moved onward, and through the night came a gentle snore. Twenty seconds and they were beside the sleeper—and he snored on. This sentry, at least, was typically Guanaman, for he slumbered at the post of duty.

Hemmett's hand was already upon the knob of the little wooden door. The thing opened freely, and before them lay black shadows, with the white light of arc-lamps on the mighty open space beyond. They had entered the National Engine Works!

Beside them loomed a wooden building, faintly illuminated, with windows well above their heads. They gazed up at the nearest, and, with a quick nod, Hemmett bent forward and braced hands on knees, while Girton, more after the fashion of an acrobat than a retired

secretary of war, clambered to his broad back and stood erect.

He was down again within half a minute, snarling under his breath!

"We've settled the status of the National Engine Works, first crack!" he whispered. "That's the shop where they finish the stocks for army rifles! There must be two thousand of them in sight, standing in racks while the varnish dries!"

"Two thousand?"

"Look for yourself if you like, Ned!"

"I'll take your word for it," Hemmett muttered. "Let's get up to the edge of this wall and see what's to be seen."

He stole along the wooden side of the building, pausing only when another foot would have found him in the white light. Hat in hand, he peered cautiously around, down the vast yard that seemed to be the center of the establishment.

Men were moving about, Guanamans for the most part, but visibly directed by at least three citizens whose blood held no Latin strain whatever—three citizens who, despite their white skins, were total strangers to a man who fancied that he knew by sight all the foreign population of Puerto Carlo! Mr. Hemmett drew a deep breath.

"I fancy that we're getting the whole story in allopathic doses, Steve!" he reported. "That appears to be the main shop over there, and there's a little door partly open. Can we duck across without being seen?"

"Start when the chance seems good," Girton said simply.

A minute dragged along, while Hemmett watched the moving figures intently, some near at hand, some far down the big yard. Two minutes went and then three—and quite suddenly the son-in-law of Guanama's richest man darted into the light with Girton at his heels, darted straight for the shadows of the tremendous building across the yard, and vanished again in the shadows!

"We got away with it!" Hemmett breathed as he tiptoed toward the door.

"We skinned through by one hair's breadth, because—by the piper that played before Moses!" he ended in an utterly thunderstruck gasp.

Girton was at his side; Girton, with the effort of his life, stifled a savage yell—because there was cause enough for several yells.

Spread before them in the blaze of a hundred arc-lamps, stretching hundreds of feet away, the big shop lay revealed. Cranes were there of gigantic proportions, and from the nearest hung a length of steel, yards and yards in length, with the black circle of its muzzle toward them—a six-inch rifle! Near the opposite wall an endless line of black circles met their eyes, finished, unmounted field-guns of the seventy-five millimeter type!

Yet the two giant lathes in the center of the shop claimed all their attention after that first dumfounding minute; one of them was empty, the other, beyond human question, held a thing plainly impossible in Guanama—a fourteen-inch gun of the most modern type in process of manufacture.

"My Lord! My Lord!" muttered Girton. "And every darned bit of it must have been landed in sections and at night, and it must have taken months to—"

"Careful! Who's this?" whispered his old friend. "Is that some one coming around the corner of the building, or—yes! Here! Duck this way!"

Even now the shadow of the newcomer fell plainly, out there in the yard, and he was moving swiftly as if to investigate their own particular nook. As one they crouched low and raced toward the far side of the alleged engine works' property, the side that gave upon the shore of Puerto Carlo harbor.

As one they slid to a standstill beside another of the little gates in the outer fence; and while sentries might be without, that figure behind carried a rifle and was still moving in their direction. He seemed uncertain still as to their presence. He paused and looked about—and with his back turned to them for an

instant, Edward Hemmett pushed open the gate and stepped forth into the blacker night, with Girton at his heels.

The gate they closed behind them without a creak. The steps within did not follow to the gate. They were safely out and—

"Halt, señor, or I shoot!" announced another of the night's black figures, thrusting the muzzle of his rifle into Mr. Hemmett's ribs!

CHAPTER VI.

ABOARD THE ALMIRANTA.

THE silent, excited little laugh which had been upon Hemmett's lips as the gate closed behind them turned to a small wheeze. Involuntarily almost he said:

"Don't touch him, Steve! He's got me covered!"

"I—I—had no idea of touching him!" Girton reported breathlessly from a point some five yards distant. "His colleague has a rifle jammed into the pit of my stomach."

The sentries were talking, too, both at once, each apparently rebuking the other for not obeying orders and shooting down any person who came through the gate in either direction!

Brief though the chatter, it gave Hemmett and Girton time for some very painful thought. That they were done for seemed beyond question; no establishment as large as the National Engine Works can keep its nature secret without very energetic measures; and doubtless other investigative minds which had passed this way had ceased to be.

It was outrageous, of course, and incredible—but so was the whole plant, for that matter. Yes, and now the sentries had concluded that orders were orders, and the barrel against Hemmett's ribs shook a little, and the click of a cocked hammer came to his ears.

Edward Hemmett, in perhaps the tenth part of one second, gathered himself for

the lightning drop, the lightning tackle of the invisible Guanaman's knees—and through the gloom came:

"What's the trouble?"

It was a sharp voice, yet strangely familiar. Following it, another of the pocket flash-lights blazed out—and amazement came into the voice and a note of sharp anxiety:

"Señor Hemmett! And Señor Girton, too! You, fellow! Drop that rifle! The señores—"

A torrent of Spanish assailed him, coming from both sentries. Hemmett's voice shook with relief as he demanded:

"Is that Luis Engoro?"

"It is Luis Engoro, lieutenant of the Guanaman navy, señor!" the anxious voice reported. "But you, señores! What are you doing here where none may come? Why—"

"Never mind what we're doing here—get us out of it!" Girton put in as steps approached from the other side of the wall. "This is no time for argument, kid! Remember that Hemmett and I fed your whole family for six months, three years ago, Luis! Remember that Hemmett and I came across with the cash for the operation that saved your life and—"

"But how can I forget, señor?" young Engoro cried agonizedly. "It is that which wrings my heart, because—enough! Come! Come quickly!"

He was a person of some authority in this accursed neighborhood. The sentries had permitted themselves to be swallowed up in the gloom, and Luis Engoro was reaching out toward Hemmett and Girton with both hands.

They caught the hands and clung to them, and Engoro started straight down the steep bank toward the water. Although it was not so very steep, was it? And a very broad flight of steps had grown up since their last visit to this particular spot!

Above, by the gateway, flash-lights were twinkling at intervals and voices rising in heated Spanish, but they did not pause to listen.

Engoro knew his way, and even now he was leading them along a narrow little dock. And now he stopped.

"Down here, señores!" he whispered. "It is the tender of the Almiranta—see! I shall put you ashore in the city."

If the tender had owned an engineer, he was elsewhere. Engoro himself set the quiet motor to humming as they cast off. Engoro, at the wheel, turned the little craft out into the harbor—and they were safe!

It had been a rather narrow squeak; and not that either Girton's brow nor Hemmett's was without a warm, shiny film induced mainly by excitement! But they were safely away from one of the world's big arms factories, and nobody had elected to shoot after them, and with every turn of the screw lurid thoughts pounded through two brains that had grown altogether too much accustomed to the peacefully conventional!

Week after week, month after month, they had fairly been sitting atop a plot of such magnitude as Guanama had never known before. Where it had started, where it might end, whither might extend its present ramifications, no man could say; but that it had corrupted at least one of Guanama's more intelligent youth was proved by Engoro's presence at that wheel and his utter silence.

"Luis!" Girton said suddenly. "Come out with the truth! Do you understand?"

"I understand, señor, but it is impossible," said Engoro thinly. "I beg of you, señor, that the—matter be left undiscussed. I have saved you."

"And we're grateful, Luis, and that doesn't alter the fact that this is one of the things that can't be left undiscussed!" Hemmett said firmly. "You come out with the truth, boy!"

"I cannot!"

"Why not?"

"Because, even for what I have done, I may pay with my life!" answered the young man. "Should I speak freely, who can say what will befall me?"

It was an astonishing statement, considering that he had done no more than save the lives of two law-abiding citizens, that he was a lieutenant in Guanama's navy, and that they were at this minute in a government tender—but he meant it. He even shuddered and glanced back at them with a face that was pale in the light of the tender's lamps.

Steve Girton rose abruptly and came to his elbow.

"Engoro," said he, "I've always liked you; you know that. We've tried to help you, too, and I'd like to help you out of this. But we're going to have the truth from you, Luis—and while we're on the job you can tell it to us aboard the *Almiranta*. I think that vessel will bear looking over about now!"

"But señor!" Engoro gasped. "That, too, is impossible!"

"Why is it impossible?"

"I will not lie, and I cannot explain," the young man said doggedly.

"Then I'll help you out of the predicament by leaving you no choice, kid," said the retired secretary of war, and the muzzle of his automatic was trained suddenly on Luis. "You make straight for the *Almiranta*, take us aboard, and show us around the ship—and if you feel inclined to do anything else, keep on heading for the shore, and we'll blow your thick young head from your shoulders, kick the carcass of a traitor overboard, and go aboard the *Almiranta* ourselves! What about it?"

The face of Luis Engoro, turned toward him, was no less than stricken. The wheel wobbled in his hands; and then, because Luis was all Guanaman, after all, he shrugged his shoulders philosophically and accepted the inevitable, quite as Girton had expected.

The tender veered about and made straight for the bulk of the *Almiranta*, out near the mouth of the harbor.

She was not all the visible part of Guanama's navy, but she was the most interesting to-night. Whatever she might be, it was certain that three more like

her were anchored down the coast, ostensibly by way of leaving more room in the harbor; actually, as the Americans suspected more and more strongly, to keep them away from interested eyes. There was something too modern about the cut of the *Almiranta* to jibe with her alleged status as the cast-off of a foreign navy, and with the low price at which Guanama had bought her.

Past the three destroyers they sped in utter silence, past the two battle-ships that had formed the nucleus of the new Guanaman navy, and on to the *Almiranta*. At her landing-stage they came to a halt; a pair of able seamen came down, and Girton and Hemmett, with Luis Engoro between them, hurried to the deck.

The lieutenant had not a solitary word to say. Nor was much information from him necessary, once they were able to inspect the cruiser at close range.

She was new! From her deck-plates to her fighting-masts she was utterly new. Her engines, when they came upon them, were of the latest and the fastest and the most powerful type. The strange trio, with Luis lagging, hurried on to her gun-rooms.

It had been announced and accepted as a matter of course that the *Almiranta* had been purchased practically without armament. That would come another year, with new appropriations.

But when Girton and Hemmett had penetrated to the fighting section of the cruiser they grew breathless for a little. She was not unarmed; she was, indeed, overloaded with armament!

Mighty batteries, some mounted, some ready to mount, were behind those closed and rusty ports; small quick-firers, shining through the thick, protective grease, were there without end—and below, very deftly arranged so that they could be put into action with a scant day's notice, three torpedo-tubes, modern to the minute, were revealed.

The *Almiranta's* magazines were not filled; they were crammed! Shells of the

newest type were there, tier on tier, ready for the ingenious hoists, themselves so modern that neither Girton nor Hemmett had ever seen their like before.

They had seen too much, this last quarter-hour, to feel great surprise at the sight; rather, they stood stunned for a little as the meaning of it all loomed before them.

Steve Girton very quietly laid a hand on Luis's arm.

"Look here, kid," said he, "you may as well talk a little now. We've seen what we came to see. You're in it thick, aren't you?"

"Yes, señor."

"Are there many more supposedly decent, intelligent boys like you in this navy?"

"The pay is high, señor," Luis muttered.

"The other cruisers down the coast—are they like this?"

"Yes, señor," Engoro whispered.

"All three?"

"All eleven—and the three battle-ships," Luis corrected.

"What?"

"It is the truth, señor, and now, I beg of you, let me say no more!" the lieutenant pleaded. "I owed you much, señores. I have paid this evening. But before—others come to ask about why I took you from the shore, will you not leave, señores? To me it means life or death—and there is no more to see. Upon that I give you my word!"

"I'll—I'll ask you one more question, and we'll skip." Girton ran his fingers through his hair and blinked confusedly, and for the second time that night wondered if reality actually could be reality. "You're too bright to be in this thing blindly, Luis. You know and we know that, for the first time in history, a European power has established a naval base on the American side of the world—and a big one. How in Heaven's name it has been kept under cover for so long passes my understanding; they must have bought Guanama body and soul. But

what I want to ask you is this: Are there more ships of this kind *coming*?"

"It has been said, señor," Engoro muttered.

"And if enough of them get here to handle the job, it is intended to attack the United States?" Girton pursued.

"It—it has been said, señor, that—that coercion—that—oh, go, señor!" Engoro floundered wildly. "For it has been sworn that death shall be the portion of one of us who—"

He could get no further. Girton, teeth grinding, gazed speculatively down at his automatic pistol. Hemmett, white again, and with hands twitching, came close to Engoro.

"You nasty little brown rat!" he said. "I'd rather be dead than be in your shoes. You can't understand that, can you? You can't understand what the United States has done for this country, for *you*, first and last, can you?"

"You don't know what gratitude is; you don't know what decency, even, means; but you do know how to sneak up on a sleeping man or a sleeping nation and drive in a knife, if you are paid, eh?"

"I'd like to kick the life out of your filthy pelt, but I'd have to kick the life out of half of Guanama afterward to be consistent, I suppose. We'll go, Engoro, and in a very little time the United States will send forces down here to spoil the whole game, and when that happens *you'll get yours!* And if I can have the job of punishing you assigned to me I'll truss you up to one of your pretty basketwork masts and leave you there till the birds pick your bones. Thank you for saving our lives, Engoro, and be damned to you! Come, Steve!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE ALARM.

A LONE sailorman, set into motion by Engoro, whose legs bade fair to collapse beneath him, ran them back to shore, trembled incessantly as he peered

about the deserted pier of the yacht club, and then, whirling about, rowed off through the night as if the powers of evil were after the boat!

It was early morning now as the two Americans tramped silently up-hill to the Hemmett home—silently because Puerto Carlo is largely ears, even in the small hours, and because each man was thinking more astonishing thoughts than the normal brain could conveniently handle. Only as they came to the terrace of the still, dark house did Girton say softly:

"Just what is going to be the speediest way of getting busy, Ned?"

"We'll sleep on it till morning," Hemmett answered. "Then we'll get Barton, the more or less gifted American minister, up here, lay the truth before him, and have a report in Washington before noon. After that, it's up to the United States—and while that has lately been a darned sight more complacent nation than it used to be in our time, I still have a suspicion that there will be something doing!"

"The nation's all right; it needs waking up, that's all!" Girton said. "And I think this 'I'll do it—and whether it does it or not, I'd rather be an American hodge-carrier than the president of this dirty, traitorous little hole. When I think—"

"That you're engaged to a Guanaman girl and I'm married to another?" Hemmett laughed queerly.

"I hadn't thought of that," the retired secretary said rather blankly.

"Well, I had, and they're no more to blame for the doings of the politicians here than the folks back home—and we won't discuss the thing over the breakfast-table, by the way."

Daylight came before sleep reached either man. Their personal world had turned upside down since eight o'clock or thereabouts last evening. Mentally, and to some extent physically, they had been settling down these last years to Guanama and all that Guanama implied.

They had been content and prosperous and too busy with routine work to give great heed to possible plottings; indeed,

while neither of them had harbored the concrete thought, perhaps, they had believed that plotting and Guanama, once so intimately associated, were divorced for all time. Ferrata was president and due for reelection, like the bulk of the lawmakers; Guanama was a hive of industry, and all was well.

And now Ferrata and his party had been ousted, and sinister influences, long at work beneath the surface, were coming into full view with some of the manifestations focusing upon themselves!

There could be no question that the hidden powers were more than merely anxious to see the last of them. Ricoro, tool or conspirator, had proved it conclusively, could they have but read the true significance of his offer at the time of its making. Jones, the incredible, had proved it—and both had proved that the giant fester was coming to a head.

Morning, as a rule, found both men very clear-brained, but not this morning. The whole thing was too overwhelming, too grotesque, for assimilation even now.

Girton, before breakfast, went with his high-powered binoculars to the terrace and looked over the National Engine Works and the Almiranta, as if to assure himself that they really existed. Rust was the thing mainly visible on such of the cruiser as might be seen from Puerto Carlo. Piles of packing-cases, tiers of harmless lumber, were all the glasses showed of the works beside roofs and walls.

Carmen, it appeared, wished to ride with the boy to an aunt in the up-hill suburbs for the morning, and her husband assented with a readiness that caused her to stare for a moment. She went, nevertheless, and before the motor was out of sight Hemmett had John Barton, the American minister, on the telephone and was fairly ordering him to report at the Hemmett home.

It was up to Barton alone, of course, and they wished sincerely that he might have been a gentleman of different stamp. They looked him over as he came in—a

plump, commonplace man, not very intelligent, not very well educated, a political growth who had been a power in his own section, and for whom some provision had to be made. The post at Guanama is not quite in the class of the Court of St. James, and its incumbents are sometimes correspondingly below what might be desired.

Still, Barton was the whole visible supply of United States authority, and when they had locked the library door and arranged things so that no interested listener could well come within range without attracting attention, they told their tale.

John Barton listened, puffing out an exclamation here and there, removing his glasses and polishing them at regular intervals, scowling incredulously at Hemmett and then at Stephen Girton—until finally they came to the end and, with a dubious glance at each other, impatiently awaited his views upon the astounding situation.

They came when he had stared perplexedly across the room for a long minute.

"I think, gentlemen, that you exaggerate!" he said heavily.

"Does that—does that mean that you don't believe what we've told you?" Girton demanded.

"I should hesitate to put it in just that way," the American minister smiled tartly. "I think, gentlemen—pardon me, I'm sure!—that you have seen some of these things and fancied the rest. The United States, as you are perfectly well aware, is on good terms with the entire world."

"So good as to make it impossible that any European nation should have decided to take a chance on coming over, picking a fight, and recapturing some of the unbelievable gold supply that has flowed into America of late years?" Hemmett cried.

Barton laughed aloud and wearily.

"Oh, but my dear sir!" he protested. "Hasn't that bugaboo been laid to rest?"

I thought, sir, that the yellow journals themselves had wearied of harping on that absurd idea."

"But—"

"And for another thing, Mr. Hemmett," the minister pursued testily, "operations of such magnitude as you suggest are perfectly impossible—secretly, at any rate! To me the idea that a gigantic naval base is forming in Guanama is simply grotesque."

"Well, in spite of what does or does not strike you as grotesque, you can go straight to the president of this republic and demand permission to inspect the National Engine Works, can't you?" Girton asked hotly.

"I can, assuredly. And I shall not render my office ridiculous by doing anything of the kind, Mr. Girton. I shall—er—report to Washington all that you have told me, not giving the statements as proven facts but as hearsay, sir."

"And you will not even verify—"

"I will do what I have said, sir, and if my government wishes me to move further in the matter, instructions to that effect will be forwarded to me, as you know. Pah, Mr. Girton! Don't glower like that.

"I know—you will know when both of you are a little calmer—that the whole thing is a false alarm. Granted that there is a gun factory out there, gentlemen. What more natural than that the Guanaman government itself, for reasons doubtless good and sufficient, has decided to manufacture its own war munitions?"

"And your nightmare cruiser and the fleet that is supposed to be somewhere down the coast! The reason for them stands on the very face of your recital. These Guanamans raise the very dickens at the idea of their precious taxes being spent for anything but plazas and public bull-rings and band concerts, as you very well know.

"Unquestionably the government is forming an efficient navy, and very wisely keeping from the public the amounts spent."

"Then you think Engoro's a fake, too?"

"I think, sir, from your account, that he was drunk!" Barton snapped. "And please do not force me to say, gentlemen, that I almost suspect—er—ahem!"

"We won't, because if you happened to say it, it might be necessary to take a good grip on the scruff of your neck," Hemmett informed him. "And let me say this, Barton: believe what you like, or believe nothing at all, I am going to take it upon myself to report to Washington direct that—"

Here he stopped, because the knocking on the door had become insistent. Girton answered it and came face to face with the little butler; and behind the little butler stood Dr. Cortera himself, perhaps the biggest medical man in Guanama and their very good and very old friend.

"Pardon me for popping in like this!" Dr. Cortera said quickly in his easy English. "It's important, the thing that brought me here. It concerns the United States, and—oh, I didn't see you, Mr. Barton."

Girton was locking the door again.

Hemmett rose to his feet. "What concerns the United States?"

"Well, a—a death-bed confession, old man," Cortera answered after a little hesitation. "I had rather intended telling you about it first and then going down with you to Mr. Barton's office if you saw fit."

"Go on!"

Cortera glanced keenly from one to the other, then smiled grimly at Barton, with his bored, cynical eyes.

"It was Captain Zarata," he said. "Peritonitis got him, after all, and he—well, he wanted to talk to me alone before he slipped away; and he did. He was commander of one of the battle-ships before disease got him, and he had a good deal on his mind—that needed confessing.

"Gentlemen," Dr. Cortera announced impressively, "Guanama has been bought up by a nation across the Atlantic.

Guanama, from one end of the coast to the other, reeks with a plot of such size as has rarely entered history!

"And to the best of my information and belief, that nation is making Guanama a base of supplies, and, when the base is all ready, the said nation is going to hand a terrible wallop to unprepared America."

CHAPTER VIII.

WILLIAM JONES AGAIN.

EDWARD HEMMETT and the retired secretary of war turned as one and looked at the American minister. Barton had been startled out of his stodgy calm, at any rate; he was holding the arms of his wicker chair and leaning forward, scowling at Dr. Cortera and blinking fast.

The doctor, for his part, gazed mild astonishment at Hemmett and Girton.

"Nothing ever surprises you, does it?" he asked.

"This doesn't, because we knew all about it last night," Girton said, with a faint smile. "Leave us out of it, Cortera, and convince Barton that it is the truth. We've told him once, and he implied that we were drunk!"

"Hey?" Cortera exclaimed.

"I—er—implied nothing of the sort!" said the American minister. "I was incredulous—frankly incredulous—and I am still incredulous! This captain, doctor? Was he in his right mind? Could he not have been speaking in the delirium which—"

"Zarata's mind was as clear as a bell up to his very last breath," Guanama's leading physician said incisively. "Don't fool yourself at all on that count, Mr. Barton. Zarata knew exactly what he was talking about, and it weighed heavily on his conscience—the existence of which, I take it, he discovered about fifteen minutes after he learned that he was at death's door.

"He felt that Guanama was playing

the United States a pretty low-down trick and he wanted to feel that he was doing what he could to undo the work. If the poor devil had lasted another hour, I'd have had information enough to stand our unfortunate little country up on edge. He didn't.

"He had given me the main facts and had informed me that the best part of the navy and three-fourths of the politicians had been corrupted with large sums of real money, and he was just about to give me some names when—he was called to the other world.

"But it's all true, and it all fits in with a dozen things I've been observing this last week or two. The whole country is honeycombed with bribery; the new navy isn't Guanama's at all! And the National Engine Works, out there on the point, gentlemen, is—"

"Yes, I've heard about that—I've heard about that," Barton said, rising with growing agitation. "I shall act, of course. I shall act at once."

"How?" Girton asked crisply.

"By reporting every detail to Washington in code immediately and signifying that the matter is urgent and needs instant action!" the American minister pursued with commendable force as he moved toward the door. "I was—er—wrong, Mr. Girton, in doubting your statements, apparently. Even now I cannot quite believe—but I will act at once."

He departed quickly.

Cortera shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I could have kept the poor wretch this side of the Styx for another hour or two," he said. "Doesn't it beat the devil—what any one with money can put across in Guanama?"

"Ten dollars, and our plain citizen will swear himself to eternal secrecy; fifty, and he'll murder his own brother; a hundred, and he'll hand you a mortgage on his eternal soul. Sometimes I think the whole lower class here are like a lot of defective children and—"

"Well, the cure for that sort of

defectiveness is spanking!" Hemmett snapped with excusable savagery. "You are not going?"

"There is a gentleman down at the hospital who is expecting me," said Cortera. "He must be under the ether by this time, but I had to drop in and tell you first. You, yourselves—what are you going to do about it? You're not the kind to sit passively and watch this kind of muddle?"

"We're going to do whatever we can do," replied Girton. "If Barton has waked up and rouses Washington, perhaps we'll have nothing to do. Good-by, old man, and thanks."

Cortera, too, hurried away. For a little time Hemmett and Girton sat and threshed the matter out, to the general end that there was really nothing to do until word had come from Washington. They were, apparently, beginning the circle again when the telephone bell rang violently.

"Barton!" said the voice at the other end. "Is that you, Mr. Girton? It is? Do you know a man named Jones, sir—William Jones?"

"Eh? I've met him—yes."

"Who is he?"

"I give it up. Why?"

"Jones, sir," said the American minister, and his voice trembled—"Jones came into this office, Mr. Girton, sat on the edge of my desk, laughed in my face, sir, and ordered me—ordered me, Mr. Girton!—to send no report whatever to Washington!"

"And—"

"I told him to go to blazes, sir, and he laughed again and—and threatened me. He informed me in so many words, Mr. Girton, that my personal welfare would be promoted by keeping complete silence!"

"And—"

"Then he blew some smoke in my face, sir, and left! I thought it best to advise you. I'm preparing my report at this minute."

"Go to it, old man!" chuckled the re-

tired minister as he hung up. "Little Bill Jones is on the job again, Ned!"

"And somebody else is here for us," stated Hemmett as he hurried to the door and unlocked it—and then started back, for, hat on the back of his head, cigar in the corner of his mouth, insolent smile on his lips, William Jones stood there, all unannounced.

"Pardon my arriving this way," he said easily as he entered. "The door was open, and I didn't want to lose any time in getting to you gentlemen. What with one thing and another, this promises to be a rather busy day, and I wanted to have my little chat with you early."

"Well, I'll be—" Girton began.

"Don't be profane, at any rate," Jones smiled. "I just dropped in, you know, to get your final answer. I've communicated with my folks overnight, and I'm able to offer a little added inducement. They tell me that they still feel that you're the men for the jobs, and that, if there's no other way of budging you, I may offer you each a fifty thousand dollars bonus, if you're willing to sail at one o'clock. Well?"

"You," said the retired secretary, "are the sneaking, slithering agent of—"

"A railroad!" Jones put in quickly. "Never lose sight of that—a railroad! And since you seem to be in a truculent mood this morning, I'll come right down to cases and cut out the pretty stuff. You two are going out of this country on the one o'clock steamer, with your people and with your pockets full of money—or you're going to be a pair of idiots and stay here and *take the consequences!* Get that?"

There was a pause in every sense dramatic. Girton doubled his fists and took a step forward. Hemmett laid a hand on his arm.

"Just a minute, Steve," he said. "He wants to cut out the pretty stuff, and we'll help him. We have to take the consequences, do we, Jones?"

"You certainly do! And don't be an ass, Hemmett! Just—"

"Well, the first consequences we'll take is you!" stated Hemmett as he gripped the gentleman's two arms. "Frisk him, Steve! He'll be carrying at least one gun!"

And then he chuckled as Jones, with a tremendous heave, sought to wrench himself loose and failed completely—and he chuckled again as Steve Girton drew from Mr. Jones's pockets a pair of automatic pistols that might have held off a mob.

"We're getting right down to cases, aren't we, Jones?" he asked. "We'll go a little farther. Open that door, Steve. And you—if you wiggle, Mr. Jones, you'll get just one whack on the vulnerable spot behind the ear, and after that we'll have to carry you."

Jones glanced at him over his shoulder. He was cool again and sneering.

"You poor clod!" he said pleasantly. "Haven't you brains enough to know that you're piling up trouble for yourself by this idiotic trick?"

"I have not! March!"

"Where to?" Girton asked.

"Out back to my nice, new stone garage," said Hemmett. "That has a good look on the outside. We'll let Jones cool off for a while, and then decide what's coming to him."

He was a curious citizen! Instead of resisting, he stepped along jauntily, accepting the situation as if it had not been just what he expected. He smiled, too; he seemed to be laughing somewhere inside—and now the door of the garage was open, with only the runabout in sight, and Hemmett sent the gentleman within and slammed the door.

"Just why did we do that?" Girton inquired when they were again in the library.

"I wanted to put him where he'd be accessible when we've had a chance to consider his case," Hemmett explained, with a half smile. "Upon my word, Steve, that cuss, with his assurance and his billion-dollar talk, makes me feel queer! He's at the bottom of the whole

thing, and it's all so big that I haven't quite comprehended it even yet! That man is the most dangerous enemy the United States has in all Guanama!"

Leaning back in his favorite chair, gnawing his cigar, he gave five minutes to a contemplation of the book-shelves, eventually to sit erect and shrug his shoulders with:

"Third degree, I guess!"

"What?"

"It isn't nice, of course, but I don't know that Jones demands any consideration, Steve. He has the eye of a physical coward, too, and somehow, after we've hammered him around that garage for a little, I believe he'll be in shape to confess all he knows!"

"And then?"

"Then we lock him up in the garage again, my boy, and send a new report to Washington. Oh, it's bizarre and unlawful and all that sort of thing; I understand that much perfectly. But we're Americans after all, Steve, and for the sake of the United States I think it's the proper caper," smiled Mr. Hemmett and gazed affectionately at his own brawny fist. "Come along, old man."

Be it admitted that Stephen Girton did not seek to stay him with protests. Stephen flexed his own hands and sighed lightly—and thus they advanced upon the ill-starred William Jones, all unaware of the elemental forces he had unleashed and which were about to alter his physical appearance and, perhaps, his mental state as well.

"When this door opens," said Mr. Hemmett as he slipped the key into the lock, "he is due to make a dive straight out that way! Stand there, Steve, and grab him."

Mr. Girton bent forward alertly. The door slid back—and Mr. Girton's pose was unaltered! Nor, after several seconds, had he gripped Mr. Jones. And now the door was wide open, and the whole interior of the garage was visible, even to the seat of the runabout—and while the garage held a pretty little

American car and several kinds of grease and a work-bench and tools and a rack for the light robes, it gave no indication whatever that William Jones existed on earth!

CHAPTER IX.

THE VANISHED JONES.

IT occurred to Hemmett that William Jones was hiding in the runabout, ready to make a dash for freedom. He crouched, therefore, and covered the two yards with a queer little spring; he reached over the dashboard with both hands—and clutched a quantity of Guanaman air!

"He isn't there; I could have told you that—I've been able to look across the car since I stood outside," Girton said somewhat faintly.

"But we—but we locked him up here!" Hemmett stammered.

"We certainly did, and just as certainly he is not locked up here now, Ned," the retired secretary agreed. "Don't stand there with your mouth open like that. Ramon is watching you from the house."

"Well, if Ramon has his eye this way, perhaps—" Mr. Hemmett began.

The butler was approaching, his small, dark countenance lined with perturbation. He came to the garage itself and bobbed his head respectfully.

"There is something wrong?" he asked. "He was, after all, not the chauffeur of the señor?"

"What?"

"*Ay de mi!* The fault is mine!" the butler confessed emotionally. "He came but to steal, yet because of his splendid clothing I have thought that he was, as he said, the new chauffeur of the señor!"

"What did he—do, Ramon?" Hemmett asked with some difficulty.

"He did but come to the kitchen, señor, and ask most courteously for the key to the garage, five minutes back! He said that Sanchez, because of his inso-

lence, had been dismissed, and that he had been engaged. He requested the key that he might secure the can of heavy grease, and he returned the key within one minute, señor. Yet see! Because the fault is mine, let what he has stolen be taken from my wage, señor, for I see—"

"Oh, shut up!" Hemmett said wearily.

The escape could have been a little simpler, perhaps, had William Jones paused to remove the garage lock and drop it into his pocket as he entered!

William Jones's own man had had his instructions and had executed them with neatness and despatch; it seemed almost as if William Jones had expected to find himself locked in the garage and issued orders accordingly ahead of time! But whether that was the case or the man had simply been waiting, had seen his employer imprisoned, and had taken the quickest means of getting him out again, Jones was gone!

"And the point of it is just this," Hemmett said bitterly as he picked up his telephone in the library: "Jones got loose because he, or his man, acted *quick*, Steve! That seems to be the keynote of all his performances—to move like lightning and hang trying to conceal anything!

"Why, all that so-called engine works property was bought in the open—and nobody thought anything of it! And the Guanama navy bills were jammed through the senate in the open—and nobody thought anything of it! And now his agent walks straight into my kitchen and demands the garage key and gets it—because Ramon couldn't see anything unusual in the stunt, and— Give me police headquarters!" Hemmett wound up disgustedly.

He waited, tapping his foot and purposely avoiding the rather sheepish smile which came to Girton's face as he pondered the latest flitting of Jones. He snapped:

"Headquarters? Give me Domez, the chief of detectives! Hello! Domez? This is Mr. Hemmett."

"Ah! The pleasure, señor, to serve one so august!" floated over the wire.

"Cut the joy stuff!" retorted Hemmett. "Domez, there's a man in town named William Jones—a man who has the whole third floor of the new hotel and drives around town in a white automobile. You know him, eh? Well, I'm glad of it. Catch him and bring him to me!"

"But—but the charge?" Domez stammered.

"I'll attend to the charge, and I'll protect you if he makes trouble," said the American. "Don't worry about that part of it. Get him!"

"But it is told, señor, that the Señor Jones is a man of great wealth and influence," the chief replied dubiously. "It is related—"

"So am I a man of great wealth and influence!" barked Mr. Hemmett bitterly. "I had enough of both to get you your present job, Domez, and I've enough of both left to take it away from you. Not that I'm asking you to do anything crooked, you understand. If you round up Jones, Guanama 'll be handing you medals a year from now. But get him!"

"If it be possible, señor!" Domez agreed somewhat faintly—and hung up!

It was the last that caused Hemmett to curse aloud, for, like many other recent happenings, that trick of hanging up the receiver was almost beyond belief.

Domez, these many years, had been the soul of respect, not to say adoration! Domez, at the slightest word of either Girton or Hemmett, had been in the habit of leaping at the task of the moment—and now, without a string of compliments and assurances, without so much as an apology, Domez had cut off the conversation!

"If it didn't seem so confounded silly, I'd say that Domez himself was in Jones's pay!" Mr. Hemmett announced.

Followed the day-long lull.

They were at liberty, if they chose, to tear about town in search of Jones themselves. They were at liberty to go

to the new President of Guanama and state the case and demand action; they did neither.

For one thing, the latter job was Barton's exclusively; for another, the visit was like to prove a sheer waste of time. Deeper than any other man in Guanama, perhaps, in this gigantic plot, would be José Altara, president of the country.

There had been much talk of fraud just after his election, and curiously enough it had been only talk. The papers, with a unanimity never before in evidence, had assured all Guanama that not a single doubtful vote for Altara had been cast; and the light of recent events was shining strongly on those papers this morning as Hemmett and Girton discussed the situation.

It might seem far-fetched, yet either would have been willing to bet a portion of his wealth that not a newspaper in the country was actually owned by a Guanaman now!

Carmen and the boy returned for luncheon, and it was a rather silent meal—the air surcharged with suspense, the lovely young Mrs. Hemmett asking questions with her eyes but not with her tongue; the boy prattling with the cheerful irresponsibility of the three-year-old, and for the first time since last evening drawing Hemmett's attention from the crisis in Guanama's affairs and those of the United States.

He was a wonderful kid, that Edward, Jr.! Hemmett still affirmed the fact to Stephen Girton not less than four times daily. He had the brain-power of a savant; he made remarks which for sheer wit and wisdom probably excelled any other remarks since children have been!

Toward three they wandered down to the American minister and found him in a distressed state. Barton had reported to Washington, and was still awaiting a reply.

He had also, in a fit of energy, gone straight to Altara and, according to his own account, confronted him flatly and

ferociously with Guanama's treachery. The upshot of the interview had been, apparently, that Altara had exclaimed in amazement, had denied all knowledge of anything of the kind, had assured the representative of the great United States that an instant investigation should be set afoot and the plotters shot as soon as they might be captured—and in the next breath had informed Barton unqualifiedly that none would be found because none existed!

Following this Altara had slapped his chest and delivered a short oration as to the eternal fidelity of Guanama to America—and when he left even John Barton had understood that Guanama's president was lying at high speed.

Evening was drawing near, and still no reply had come. Hemmett and Girton, having tired of watching Barton bite his nails, of hearing him call up the cable-office to learn that no official message was on the wire, eventually walked back to their home.

They were in for a quiet night, apparently; perhaps they were in for a quiet six months or a year. Outwardly, the international affairs of the United States were calm and pleasant, and trouble of this kind cannot be forced in a minute. Then, too, the eventual staggering move would mean troops, doubtless to be moved as quietly as possible from Europe to Guanama and thence north when the time came.

True, they might mean to move directly across the Atlantic, but—it was all a little way in the future. Having readjusted their minds to the trouble that was brewing, Hemmett and Girton were almost themselves again as they climbed the white steps to the Hemmett home.

And then, leaving the state where it involved millions of human beings, the mystery centered suddenly on the house itself!

Hemmett was even laughing when a shrill cry came from the direction of the garage, lately the prison of William Jones. He brought up short; he turned

to Girton and found the latter suddenly white.

"Was that the kid?" he gasped.

"That's the kid, and he's hurt!" Girton replied, leaping to the side of the house and the runway to the garage—stopping short then as Hemmett slid to his side. "Look! Look!"

He pointed with his left hand, fumbling wildly for his pistol with the right. He had left it up-stairs that morning—and he ceased fumbling and collided with the house itself as Hemmett dashed past!

For the boy was there in the arms of a lithe little Guanaman, who had paused misguidedly, to try thrusting a cloth into the child's mouth. Wild with terror, Edward, Jr., was beating at him with both little pink fists, turning his curly head from side to side, kicking and again managing to scream for help.

And now, in the second or so that followed the scream, his captor was turning to the father and looking straight into his eyes; and since all Guanama knew of Hemmett's pistol-aim, since the automatic in Hemmett's hand was descending swiftly to shooting position, he would drop the boy and seek to save his own life or—no, he had no intention of dropping the boy, after all! With a tiger bound he made for the side of the garage, and the boy was held high between his own body and Hemmett.

And his heart must lie squarely between the pink-socked legs he clutched!

Edward Hemmett, turned to frozen steel, fired and closed his eyes!

CHAPTER X.

JONES WORKS ON.

A CENTURY dragged along, and still Hemmett could not force his eyes to look! Once upon a time he would have wagered an even hundred dollars against a nickel on his chances of hitting a penny at that range; now, for two years at least, he had fired hardly a shot. And if he had missed the mark this time—

A new scream of fright opened his eyes. He drew breath with a gasp and dashed forward, and already Girton had the boy in his arms and was soothing him and asking him if he was hurt and feeling over the round little body.

"You—you didn't touch him, thank God!" he quavered.

"Are you sure? Are you sure? Steve, give him to me!" Hemmett mouthed frantically as he snatched the boy. "Sonny! Dad didn't hit you? Does it hurt anywhere, sonny? Are you sure it doesn't Neddy? Are you sure? Tell dad!"

Another shriller scream was coming from the house—Carmen this time. Hemmett gripped himself and held the boy a little tighter. Your Guanaman girl has hardly conquered hysteria as yet, although Carmen had remarkable self-control for one of her blood; his own calm was very essential just now, and he even contrived to smile as his beautiful wife sped to his side.

"It's all right, little girl," he said. "It's all right. The kid isn't hurt."

"Give him to me! Give him to me!" cried the mother as she turned shudderingly from the sight just beyond. "That man—that—oh!"

And now the younger Edward Hemmett was in her arms, and she sobbed over him, while Girton rose to his feet after a very brief, conclusive inspection of the mistaken individual who had turned abductor.

"This was his farewell appearance as a kidnaper," he said grimly. "He's stone dead!"

"And better that he had died by torture!" Carmen cried surprisingly. "For he sought to steal my baby, and—"

"There, there!" her husband put in, himself decidedly whiter. "Whatever it was, it is all over now, child. Take the boy in, and get out of this yourself, Carmen."

"And you—for killing him, what will they do to you?"

"They won't do much of anything to

me, my dear," Hemmett said grimly. "We'll have to leave him here for the police, Steve. Come. Tell Ramon to cover him."

He led the way into the house and Girton followed, also decidedly jarred. Mr. Hemmett, having seen his family on the way up-stairs, returned to the telephone and demanded speech with the chief of detectives.

"That's you, is it, Domez?" he inquired. "Well, this is Mr. Hemmett once more. Domez, a man just tried to kidnap my boy, and I shot him dead. I want his body out of here inside of fifteen minutes, and after that I'm at your service whenever you need me. What? No, I understand that you'll make things simple for me if I have witnesses, and I've got 'em. And another thing, Domez! I don't think as much of you or this country as I did twenty-four hours ago, and I want to tell you candidly that if any one else tries anything of this kind on me, I'm going to hold you personally to account! Yes, that means just what it says."

He pushed away the instrument with a little shudder and rose.

"I'll go and see how Carmen's getting on, Steve," he said. "You attend to—the matter out there."

It had been attended to before Hemmett returned—oddly attended to, for that matter. The motor patrol-wagon, bell-muffled, had whisked around from the hill police station and directly up the drive to the garage; with scant ceremony the misguided Guanaman had been loaded aboard. After that, the suave officer who accompanied the vehicle took Stephen Girton aside and, much as if a favor had been done to the force itself and to himself in particular, smilingly informed him that, since no attention had been attracted from the street, the matter might be considered closed!

It was very, very puzzling! In Guanama, when a shooting has taken place, little police officials are wont to swarm over the entire landscape, waving hands,

taking notes and photographs, questioning everybody, summoning everybody, threatening everybody, and assuring everybody that the criminal will not only be found but also drawn and quartered. This unfortunate affair, twenty minutes after the shot, might never have happened. So Stephen Girton informed his friend when he reappeared frowning.

"I'm sorry!" Hemmett muttered. "It gives me the shakes to think about it—but what else was there to do? The first thing that flashed on me was that this was more of Jones's work, Steve—that he was taking the boy to hold for ransom, and—I shot!"

"And the way the police have acted bears it out, too."

"Perhaps—perhaps not. I'm more inclined to think that the man was operating on his own hook and—"

His teeth clicked together; he listened attentively. There was a disturbance outside and the chattering of Ramon's excited tenor; and now steps came toward the room, and Barton, wild-eyed, hatless, burst in upon them.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" he cried. "The—the devil is in this town! The—my wife, gentlemen!"

"What's happened?" Girton asked quickly.

Barton tottered into a chair.

"Kidnaped! Abducted!" he choked. "She—she is gone!"

"Gone where?"

"Great God, man! Do you suppose I'd be sitting here if I knew that?" the American minister cried. "She went for a ride with her friend, Mrs. Halliday—you know the woman? They stopped at one of the big sheps down-town, Tremino's, I believe, and Mrs. Halliday went in to get something. She was just coming out when—when it happened!"

The shooting was quite forgotten! Girton on one side, Hemmett on the other, they came close to Barton as the latter choked on:

"It—it would seem—Mrs. Halliday was greatly excited—it would seem that

another automobile drove up beside the one in which Mrs. Barton sat, gentlemen. Everything must have been prearranged, for she says that three men stepped out at once and into the Halliday car. They threw a blanket or something of the sort over Mrs. Barton and lifted her bodily into their own machine—and it was speeding away before any one could raise a hand!"

The retired secretary looked at his friend. Barton gazed wildly from one to the other.

"What shall I do, gentlemen?" he cried. "Don't stand there like that! My wife! Don't you understand, *my wife*—"

"We understand perfectly, Barton," Hemmett said quietly. "My boy all but got the same dose. I was lucky enough to shoot the fellow who had him. Has anything of the sort been threatened?"

"No, nor dreamed of!"

"Have you been having trouble with any one, Barton?"

"Mr. Hemmett, I am positive that I haven't made an enemy since I came to this hell-hole!"

"Nor Mrs. Barton?"

"Why, Martha's positively afraid of the native element!" Barton cried.

"We'll have to charge it up to Jones, I think."

"You believe that the man is so utterly abandoned as to attack women and children?" Barton gasped, and it was noteworthy that his faith in Hemmett's estimate of the Jones character seemed to have increased since their last meeting.

"I'm not quite sure what I think," Hemmett confessed. "They're coming a little too fast for me, but—here! Give me that telephone! Police headquarters again!"

He waited impatiently until the click came from the other end of the line; then:

"Domez? Yes, it's Hemmett again! Domez, have you found Jones yet?"

"Señor, in all Puerto Carlo there is no trace of the Señor Jones," the chief of detectives informed him smoothly.

"That's a lie, and I think you know it. Listen, Domez. The wife of the American minister has been kidnaped. Yes, you may well gasp! What? Well, I don't know how you're going to find her, but I do know that if you don't find her you'll have an American fleet shelling Puerto Carlo inside of a week! What? Well, Domez, we'll put it in another way, then! If you haven't returned that lady to her home before midnight, you'll reckon with me and the same gun that killed the fellow who tried to get my boy. Think it over!"

This time it was Mr. Hemmett who hung up the receiver unexpectedly, but there was no anger in his face as he turned back to them. Instead, the slight pallor had returned and Hemmett's eyes were undeniably round.

"I can't make it out!" he said. "Unless Domez himself is in the very thick of the thing, I can't make it out! By all precedents he ought to have howled and protested when I talked to him that way—and instead he had the cold nerve to tell me that if the American fleet turned up looking for trouble it was likely to get all it came after!"

"Fact?" cried Girton.

"Almost word for word!"

"But my wife, gentlemen!" gasped the agonized Barton. "What of her? What did he say? What shall we do?"

Hemmett's shoulders squared as he considered the unfortunate gentleman, his round face fish-white and wet with perspiration, his collar wilted, and his hands twitching incessantly.

"He said that he would start men out at once, of course," he replied quietly. "That may mean everything or nothing. As to what we'll do, Barton, we'll get out and start the grand hunt for Mrs. Barton ourselves."

"And I want to tell you that, so far, this country hasn't succeeded in putting over anything on Girton and me! When we start for Mrs. Barton, we'll bring her back in good shape or we'll have half this town shot to flinders."

"I'll tell Mrs. Hemmett that she's going over to her father's with the boy. Fernandez is alert enough when he's roused to danger, he can shoot straight, and there are at least two men servants over there who can be trusted implicitly—which is rare in this town just now! I'll be down in about five minutes and we'll start."

Breathing hard, he climbed the stairs to the quiet upper floor. Now and then, even in Guanama, things grow too utterly outrageous—and this was surely one of the times.

That the younger Edward Hemmett had all but fallen victim to the abductor was bad enough, but at least that stunt had been nipped in the bud. When it came to abducting the middle-aged wife of the middle-aged and ostensibly important American minister, however, in the open business street—yes, that was carrying the thing altogether too far.

Mr. Hemmett paused at his room to slip a fresh box of cartridges into his pocket, paused at Girton's room to secure that gentleman's automatic, and then entered his wife's bedroom.

Carmen's maid sat there, half asleep, as usual, while the boy, a little paler but even now settled down to a picture-book, sat on the floor beside her.

"The señora?" Hemmett said briefly.

"In the boudoir, señor."

The señora's husband scowled about the room.

"Hasn't she finished dressing for dinner?"

"Not yet, señor. She is but half dressed," the maid droned. "She stepped into the boudoir for her diamond comb, I think. She is still there."

"Still, eh? How long has she been there?"

"These fifteen minutes, señor," the maid informed him placidly.

Mr. Hemmett crossed to the closed door and tapped it briskly. There was no response. He tapped again. Still no sound came from beyond the portal.

"Carmen!" called Hemmett.

Only silence answered him. And his skin crawled suddenly; he could feel his hair rising. Not, of course, that anything could have happened to Carmen, upstairs in her own home, but—Carmen's husband opened the door suddenly and stepped into the boudoir.

It was empty!

Over there a broken chair lay in three pieces upon the floor—and over *there* was one of Carmen's huge cut-glass toilet-water bottles, upside down in the corner and unbroken.

Yes, and here was the torn fragment of a silk petticoat, and here again was one of the combs she had worn that afternoon, trampled to bits!

And the door of the big closet was open, and several garments were upon the floor, pitched about in wildest confusion, as if a violent struggle had drawn them from their hangers. And the farther door, which led to the corridor and the back stairs, stood wide open! But of Carmen Hemmett herself there was no sign at all!

CHAPTER XI.

IS ANY ONE SAFE?

ONCE upon a time, in a railroad camp just east of the Rockies, the seven-foot camp bully had sought to impress his will upon Edward Hemmett, who chanced to be in charge. They still talk about the battle out that way, as one of the liveliest two-man affairs ever staged; when it was finally over friends had carried the big man down to the creek and bathed his brow for something like an hour before he returned to life—but at one period the outcome had been in doubt, for the giant's fist had landed directly between Edward Hemmett's two eyes.

As concerned Mr. Hemmett, the entire universe had bounced upward about three inches and settled back again with a soul-shaking slam—and, for the second time in his life, he experienced the same sensation as he stood in the center of Carmen's boudoir!

His fists, turned to ice, were clenched but useless at his sides. His head whirled crazily; he could feel his whole body swaying ridiculously for second after second. Then blood began to flow again and Hemmett bounded at the open closet.

She simply could not be gone! There had been a fight of some kind in here, probably with one of the servants, because servants in Guanama are as prone to do the unexpected as so many dynamite bombs. And she must have fainted into that closet or—no, she wasn't in the closet!

Hemmett had dived down and both hands had covered the floor in three seconds; and again the crazy reeling attacked his brain.

And as quickly the reeling left! This was no time for hysterics. If the mysterious blight had fallen upon his own wife, it was the moment of all his existence ripest for quick action.

Mr. Hemmett, conquering the wild glare of his eye, the tendency of his voice to rise in a shout, went back to the door of the bedroom and beckoned the maid. It was a gesture so odd that she obeyed instantly; and when the door had been closed behind her and the younger Edward could not see, Hemmett gripped both the girl's arms and clutched her so energetically that his fingers drove into the soft flesh.

"Your mistress! Where is she? Quick!"

"She—she is not here?" the girl cried wildly.

"No, and you know it! What happened in here?" her employer snarled. "Talk! D'ye hear! Talk, or I'll wring your neck!"

"But, señor!" the frightened girl protested faintly. "I do not know! I have but waited for the señora! See! As you found me sitting, so have I been sitting since the señora closed this door—this I swear! At—at one time it seemed to me that I heard a fall, but I called and there was no answer. It was not for me, señor, to go and open a door which—"

"This fall—when did you hear it?"

"Not five minutes back, señor!"

One of her arms Mr. Hemmett flung away from him; the other he gripped the tighter and dragged the girl across toward the corridor door.

"You come with me!" he panted. "I think you're lying, but—you come with me!"

Quite unaware of her gaspings and stumblings, he made for the back stairs and down them to the main floor. There was a little foyer here, with the kitchen and the storerooms at the sides, the corridor to the body of the house just behind, and the back door just ahead; and while it had been Edward Hemmett's intention to turn into the kitchen and summon every oily, smirking servant in the place, he halted at the open door.

Part of the story at least lay out this way! On the concrete pavement was the companion to the broken comb up-stairs; on the pavement, too, lay a little torn strip of ermine fur. It was not, perhaps, the only bit of ermine in Guanama; but it was one of a very few; and as certainly as if he had seen it torn away, Hemmett knew that the white fragment had come from the wide collar of Carmen's opera-cloak.

His very breath seemed to stop. Subconsciously, up to this very moment, he had been trying to assure himself that the confusion above was merely accident, that Carmen had stepped down-stairs on some perfectly conventional errand; now that last foolish little hope had departed, and Hemmett, pushing the girl from him, was out in the air and looking around wildly.

There was nothing whatever to be seen—pavement was there and the garden beyond and the stone garage, open; but never a sign of Carmen. He wheeled about, causing the maid to scream faintly and crouch into a corner as he passed; he dashed at the door of the only model kitchen in Guanama and through it.

Amid white tiles and copper pots only the fat, elderly Elenida was visible; and

she, as he noted dizzily, sat in a chair and rocked, whining the while!

"What—what—" Hemmett choked. "What the devil's the matter with you? Where's Ramon?"

"Gone, señor! And evil comes to this house, for—"

"Gone where?"

"In the automobile—the white automobile!" the woman chattered. "And I know that evil comes to this house, señor, for the gift has been given me to know when these things are to come. My mother, señor, was one of seven—"

"You'll find that gift has some red-hot personal application to yourself if you don't calm down!" her employer said savagely as he shook her. "Stop that howling and tell me what has happened! What white automobile! Where was it? Why did Ramon go in it?"

"How is it given to me to say that, señor?" the woman choked. "See! It came, this milk-white wagon of the devil, and stopped behind the house—out there, señor! The ever-sneaking, listening Ramon laughed as it came, señor, and sped away as if possessed, running up the stairway.

"After that, I do not know. There was a struggle of some kind just overhead, I think—and then, upon the stairs a sound of feet, and after that the white wagon went, señor, swiftly as the wind, with Ramon sitting beside the driver!"

"And your señora somewhere else in the car?" Hemmett forced himself to say.

"The señora?" The woman's eyes rolled in scared amazement. "I do not know, señor. They carried something, I think. There were two men in the back—one a white man, the other a mighty brown man I have never seen before. I have spoken, señor! I know no more, but the gift was given me early to know when evil was about to befall those who—"

Edward Hemmett had left her. Carmen's personal maid—where was she? He looked up and down the corridor; he raced back to the open air and to the

side of the house. He saw her, fleeing, just turning into the back street. But at least she carried nothing, and his heart bounded in momentary relief; for an instant an overwrought mind had assured him that, even in these few seconds, the maid had secured young Edward.

Straight up-stairs he went without drawing breath, through the boudoir, and into the bedroom. The boy still sat there with his book, and Hemmett snatched him up and held him fast as he made for the main stairway, down this and into the room below where Barton sat and wrung his hands, and Girton spoke what were intended for soothing, reassuring words.

"You're ready to start, Mr. Hemmett?" the American minister cried.

"Mr. Girton says that—"

"My wife's gone, too!" Hemmett exploded.

"Carmen?" cried Girton.

"Snatched out of this house while we were talking in this very room!" Carmen's husband told them. "Don't ask me how it happened, Steve—it did happen! Ramon, the little devil, must have raced up-stairs and thrown her opera-cloak over her head and carried her down to Jones's own car, evidently with Jones himself in it!"

He laughed insanely at the sight of Girton's face.

"And I'll kill Jones and I'll kill Ramon and I'll kill every other dirty little Guanaman that ever took a penny of Jones's money, or I'll—"

"Hush!"

"Hush!" Hemmett fairly screamed.

"Good God, Steve! Haven't you any conception of what it means to have one's wife stolen and—"

"Yes, I've a darned better conception than you think," Girton said. "Better than I might have had myself six months ago. Ned, you're going to leave the boy over with his grandfather?"

"Yes!"

"Then I'll telephone Mercedes and

have her come up there with her parents. Her father's a pretty old man, and they haven't a man servant on the place under sixty or so. It may be silly, but I can't help it."

"Then telephone her and don't wait here till she arrives!" Hemmett snapped. "I understand, but time's too precious now to waste one minute."

He scowled as the telephone-bell rang. He would have liked to snatch Girton from the room and out on the chase; and he snapped his fingers impatiently as the retired secretary of war picked up the instrument and called:

"Mr. Hemmett's home. Girton speaking. Well?"

Then, while Barton gnawed his fingernails and Hemmett gave over his finger-snapping and tried to soothe his little son, to still the frightened weeping that had come with these last few minutes, and to answer evasively the questions about "mother," and where she had gone, Mr. Girton listened—impatiently for the first five seconds, mouth opening through the next, cheeks whitening steadily through another five!

And having listened so long, he whirled upon Barton and Hemmett.

"Mercedes!" he shouted. "Ned—*Mercedes!*"

"What is it, Steve?"

"They've got her, too! They've taken Mercedes!"

CHAPTER XII.

JONES SPEAKS.

IN Hemmett the gift for swift thinking was temporarily numbed.

"Mercedes?" he repeated almost stupidly. "You don't mean—"

Girton, pale and panting, was chattering at the telephone again.

"Go on! Go on!" he said. "Yes, I'm listening. What? See here, Tesoro! Don't waste one second in weeping. Yes, she's your daughter, but if you knew what she means to me! Yes, pardon me!

I understand. Go on, please. Mrs. Barton has been taken the same way, and Carmen, too!"

He ground his teeth as the diaphragm clattered frantically for a little; and then it stilled and his white face grew more tense. Girton nodded thrice, listened again, and finally rang off with a groan.

"It's the same thing!" he reported wildly. "It must have been all worked out in the finest detail beforehand. Mercedes and her parents were coming up here for dinner, you know."

"I'd forgotten it!" Hemmett confessed.

"So had I, for that matter. It seems, according to her father, that she was all dressed and ready even to that fuzzy white opera-cloak of hers. Her mother wasn't quite ready, and Mercedes went into the garden and was walking around, when—"

His forced calm broke for a moment.

"What else? What else?" Hemmett cried impatiently.

"She—she was down near the foot of the place, Ned, and her father happened to be looking that way from his window. He says that there wasn't one second's warning of what was coming—that he saw no sign of an automobile coming into the back street or anything of the kind. That big latticed gate at the bottom of the garden opened, and two men shot in, threw something over the poor little kid, and carried her out bodily to the white automobile that was waiting.

"He says that before he could even get breath enough to shout the thing was gone—and when he went down there, as fast as he could go, the little policeman who was just coming up the street vowed that no white car had passed. D'y'e hear, Ned? Even the uniformed police—"

"I hear," Hemmett answered grimly and with a calm that had come suddenly to him.

Barton was on his feet.

"And now let us start, gentlemen!" he cried. "In the name of Heaven. let us start and—"

Edward Hemmett laid a hand upon his arm and smiled—a smile so awful that Barton gulped and dropped back limply.

"Mr. Barton, we'll start just as soon as we see what we're starting after," said Hemmett. "I've been thinking pretty hard this last minute or two, and it seems to me that perhaps a frenzied rush is just what is expected of us—and the last thing to do. The impulse—yours, Girton's, mine—is to tear out and kill everything in sight."

"But, Mr. Hemmett—"

"Just a minute! We're up against something here that's looking bigger to me every minute. In half an hour our wives and Steve's sweetheart have been abducted in broad daylight, and they're all women of prominence and way up in Guanama circles. Ordinarily a stunt like that would be enough to start a revolution, and the fact that they've gone about it so brazenly must mean that everything has been arranged for ahead of time. If we're to get those women back unharmed wits 'll have to do the job!"

"But you're not going to stand here and deliver an oration about it until they've been—" Girton began.

"I am not!" Hemmett corrected sharply, picking up his little son again. "I am going to take Neddle over to his granddad and rouse Fernandez, Steve. Meanwhile, you call up the barracks and get Carmen's brother, Colonel Fernandez."

"You want him here?"

"If the Second Cavalry is as absolutely right and as absolutely loyal as it has been since I put it together, I want him to come up here with a full troop and stand guard on all four sides of his father's house. That 'll take you about two minutes. Then call up Domez, and tell him that I want him here at once! I want Domez personally, Steve, and, I want him here by the time I've returned from Fernandez's!"

One arm around the boy, the other hand on the butt of his automatic, Hemmett strode out.

The street was perfectly placid as he crossed. The hour of the siesta was long over now, and early-dining Guanamans of the better class were strolling out, on their way down to the plaza and the evening promenade and band concert.

They stared at Mr. Hemmett and his fierceness as they saluted him, and for a moment it seemed that none of the recent nightmare could have taken place—and then he was confronting his father-in-law and barking forth the first words of the awful news, and the spell was on again.

Fernandez did not collapse; neither did he scream or wring his hands; for Fernandez owned a certain solidity that had gone a long way toward making him the richest man in Guanama. Rather, he paled and listened quietly—broke forth for a moment in a torrent of dreadful promises for the man who had taken his younger daughter—then controlled himself and bade Hemmett speed away and have no fear for the boy.

Feeling the tiniest shade of relief on one count, at least, Hemmett raced back to his home.

"The kid's coming with his entire regiment, I take it," Girton reported. "He had bugles blowing before he rang off."

"Domez?"

"He said he would speed here on the wings of the wind, but he didn't seem enthusiastic about it."

"We'll give him five minutes," Hemmett announced, glancing at his watch. "I have a notion that we can learn something from him, but it's not worth waiting longer than that on the chance. You see, Domez—Hello! Somebody else calling, eh?"

He picked up the telephone. "This is Hemmett. Well?"

"This is Jones," said the voice at the other end. "Well?"

"You? You damned hound, I—"

"The time to stop that sort of tommyrot is right now, Mr. Hemmett," the voice interrupted, and even in the surge of fury

that was upon him Hemmett recognized the razor-edged quality of the tone. "I am a patient man, you know. I have tried to be very reasonable and liberal with you, Hemmett, and with Girton, and it was really quite useless. Are you calmer now? Can you listen quietly to a little proposition, do you think?"

"What?"

"There! That sounds much better!" Mr. Jones assured him. "The proposition is this, Mr. Hemmett: We wish you to leave the country—you and yours. Really we do, and it's no reflection at all upon yourselves. We wish it—do you understand?—and what we wish we have, as a rule.

"Now, the very pleasant and satisfactory way to conclude this matter—the very obliging way, so far as I am concerned, it seems to me, would be for you and Mr. Girton and Mr. Barton and the several ladies concerned to leave Guanama this evening on a yacht which I shall provide, and which will take you to the Isthmus and leave you there."

"Jones, I—"

"Oh, please!" the voice said playfully. "I'll go farther! I'll have a man aboard who will hand you every penny of the splendid sum I promised, Hemmett—who will even take your signature to the contracts which I mentioned, providing handsomely for your next ten years. As man to man, I ask you if any one could do more? If any one who has been treated as you have treated me would do as much? Do you accept?"

"No!" roared Hemmett. "And—"

"Then listen, and don't waste your breath yelling, because you'll need it all for weeping," Mr. Jones pursued; and the change in his voice was as remarkable as had been the change in his expression during their interview.

"You're an ass—a poor, stubborn, half-witted dolt, Hemmett. A man tries to treat you white, and you bawl and bellow at him and—let it go at that. You're going to be out of this country before day after to-morrow, all three of

you. And, believe me, Hemmett, if you're not you will receive, each of you, the right ear of the lady in whom he is most interested!

"On the morning after that you will receive each the left ear of the same lady! And after *that*, Mr. Hemmett—oh, they're beautiful, two of them at any rate. Give your imagination full rein; it will not overstep the probabilities, believe me!"

The words ended in a ripple of sinister laughter. Choking, numb, and icy from head to foot, unable to part his dry, hard lips, Edward Hemmett for the moment could not believe that he heard aright.

"So that is really the situation, and if you doubt it so much the worse for yourselves and your respective ladies," the voice went on easily. "You've lost your chance at the money now, poor fool; I still give you the chance to save the women. Do you leave this evening or do you not? You have just one minute in which to answer."

And here the lips parted.

"Jones!" cried Mr. Hemmett. "As sure as there's a God above us, I swear to you that if I pay for it with my life I'll—"

He ended in a sudden gasp. He jerked the receiver-hook up and down. "Get that connection again, operator! Get that wire again!"

A minute passed—and another and another. The diaphragm rattled faintly, and Hemmett hung up the receiver with trembling hand.

"He's gone!" he whispered. "That was Jones, and he has them! And he said that unless we get out of the country to-night, Carmen—and Mercedes—"

He could not continue, nor would Barton let him; Barton, on his feet, was shouting:

"Then we'll give him what he wants! We'll go, man! We'll all go and—tell him that, Hemmett!"

"I'm afraid it's too late now," Hemmett managed. "We'll stay, Barton, and I promise you that, if they don't kill me

first, I'll have the life of every one in Guanama that's mixed up in this plot!"

It was, to be sure, a rather sweeping statement, the size of the intrigue considered. Having made it, Mr. Hemmett snatched up his hat and moved toward the door, and even Barton shrank from before the eyes that blazed in his bloodless countenance.

Yet as he turned the knob the door opened from the other side, and they saw the plump, elderly Elenida, evidently the last remaining of the household servants, and behind her the thick, squat figure of Domez, chief of detectives.

He was more than merely nervous. He entered with what was meant for jauntiness, and his smile was a ghastly thing to see. He bobbed his head at them, and, turning away after his first look into Hemmett's eyes, nevertheless addressed that gentleman directly:

"You have sent for me, señor?"

"Yes, and now—"

"As to the ladies, señor—yes, of a certainty!" the little man broke in. "It is of them, Heaven be praised, that I bring news!"

"What?"

"It is indeed the truth! They are still to be recaptured without great effort, señor!" Domez declaimed fervently, thrusting out his hands. "This has been discovered by my men, señor: that the ladies, even now, have been started on their journey to the hill country!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ALVAREZ BRINGS TIDINGS.

COMING through the red haze of fury that enveloped the senses of all three, there was something strangely steadying in the statement of the detective chief. It was, as a matter of fact, the very first, definite, concrete bit to rise to the surface of the turmoil—and Hemmett at least seized upon it within the second.

One stride, and he had gripped the

smaller Domez by either shoulder, his eyes were burning into Domez's own, and he was saying:

"Hill country? Which hill country?"

"Ah, señor! Not to that accursed region where rocks freeze the soul and—"

"Never mind the poetry! Where are they being taken?"

"To the region of Las Almas, señor, where once the señor's great army was in training! There, señor, are the esteemed, the suffering señoras, the lovely señorita, to be taken!"

This time he faced Hemmett squarely—and the effect was rather curious. Mr. Hemmett returned the stare, and found himself facing a smile in which relief played no small part. Mr. Hemmett's lips opened suddenly—and closed again so suddenly that they heard the click of his teeth.

"Well, go on, Domez," he said quietly. "Your men found out that much?"

"My men, indeed, señor!"

"It was clever. What else is there to tell?"

And now he even smiled, and a deep, pleased breath escaped the chief of detectives. He looked keenly at Hemmett for an instant and grew downright bland.

"See, señor, what it is to have trained men to the great efficiency!" he said. "It has been learned—it has been reported to me, by Perequito, peer of all detectives in Guanama, that a vast plot exists, even as the señor has suspected—that the ladies were to be held as hostages! This came to my ears, señor, and I leaped to action that should prevent the crime! Too late! Even as my men were mustered word came that the worst had happened!"

"I see," said Mr. Hemmett even more quietly. "What else?"

"With all speed I despatched Perequito and seven others, señor—to learn what might be learned, and that without an instant's delay. And, señor, the honored secretary of war had but telephoned me, a little while ago, when they came to report once more.

"The ladies have been taken and are being held by a superior force, so that my men dared not attack, yet they have learned that a special train was waiting, señor! They have learned that the scoundrels mean to imprison the ladies in the far hills—and I have provided for the rescue!"

"How?"

"The large official police car waits without, with five men, señor, and nine more have been sent to follow the special should it start before we can reach it. Come, then, and it may be that, even before they can start from Puerto Carlo, the rescue may be effected. If not—"

"Well?"

"If not, we will follow by the high-road, pass the train, and await it at Las Almas! Come!"

He turned toward the door, with a queer, assured little jerk, as if entirely certain that Hemmett and the rest would follow. For that matter, Mr. Hemmett did take a pace or two after him, but only to call:

"Domez!"

"Señor?"

"Don't hurry away. Just wait a minute—*like this!*"

Hemmett lunged! His powerful fingers wound suddenly about the amazed little man's thick throat; a swing, and the chief of detectives had been flattened, face up, across the heavy table! And Mr. Hemmett, choking at him with an enthusiasm that boded ill for Domez, hissed:

"Stop that gurgling! I look like an idiot, Domez—that's evident—but there are still a few people in this abandoned hole who can't put anything over on me, and it is your misfortune to be among the number!"

"Señor!" squawked thickly from the throat.

"I want the truth, and I want it quick—and Heaven help you, Domez, if you don't tell it! I want to kill somebody, and you're handiest! Talk, and don't try to wriggle loose!"

"The truth—the truth, señor!" Domez sputtered wildly. "I—do not know the truth!"

"Then I think I'll send you where they'll get it out of you with a red-hot pitchfork!" Hemmett stated, and the fingers tightened again.

And not without effect this time, for Domez's thick fingers gripped his hands and tugged at them as his face blackened. Domez, just as Mr. Hemmett was readjusting his grip, screamed:

"Hear me, then! Hear me, señor!"

"Well?" Hemmett relaxed his hold almost regretfully.

"It is but the orders of the great señor—the Señor Jones—that I follow!" cried the detective chief, who had acquired remarkable directness of thought and speech during the last few seconds. "I speak the truth in this! I swear it! It has been said to me by the Señor Jones himself that the women are to be abducted and that the police are not to see! He paid me much money, señor, before this thing was done."

"Don't stop there," Hemmett said quickly. "Where have they been taken?"

"Kill me, but that I cannot tell you!" shrieked Domez. "A certain signal, señor—a certain signal, and I was to come and say to you that the women went to the hills. More than this I do not know, but—"

If eyes meant anything, if waving hands and general expression meant anything, he was telling the truth this time. Mr. Hemmett, the fingers still on the throat, studied the pop-eyed, congested countenance for many long seconds, at last to release the little man and step away.

"That's enough, Domez. You'll stay here a while now."

"That—that is the truth, señor!" the detective chief chattered, staggering to his feet. "And as for staying here, I dare not go farther now! Jones has spies, señor, even in the churches of Guanama! Jones has spies in every store, in every street, in every stable and garage, and

every company of the army Jones has spies. Now he will kill me!"

"And darned little loss to anybody!" Mr. Hemmett observed. "I'll settle with you later, Domez. Just now—Who's that?"

Some one else, to be sure, had arrived—some one who came into the house with a bound, spoke swiftly to Elenida, apparently, dashed into their very midst.

"Alvarez!" Girtan cried.

It was indeed Alvarez, their friend—Alvarez, who had been their friend years ago, when first they came to Guanama. He had been a very young man in those days; now he had prospered, and the Alvarez docks, eventually, bade fair to handle the bulk of Puerto Carlo's commerce!

But he was the same old Alvarez, honest and open as the day, devoted to themselves as he had been in the earlier times; and now he stood with hands outstretched, in wildest excitement.

"Señores!" he cried gaspingly. "The Señora Hemmett—the lovely Señorita Tesoro—the Señora Barton, I think! I have seen—I have seen—"

"Seen *them*?" Girtan said.

Alvarez gripped himself hard, well aware of time's value.

"I have seen them!" he said swiftly. "At this minute they are being taken from Puerto Carlo on the torpedo-boat destroyer, El Fuego!"

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCERNING THE NAVY.

EVENTS had pressed very swiftly this late afternoon. False though they knew it to be, the impression of the women being taken to the hills still lingered in three brains. Hence, three men stared blankly at Alvarez, while the fourth, which was Domez, huddled down in a corner of the room and gazed fearfully at the windows.

"El Fuego?" Hemmett stammered after a second or two.

"El Fuego, to be sure, señor—the swift, the racer, El Fuego! I have seen it with my own eyes!"

"How?"

"From the roof of my No. 2 dock, where men were working and where I went to see the progress they had made! I stood there, Señor Hemmett, gazing across the harbor, and as I gazed there left the yacht-club dock a speedy tender and—"

"How long ago?" Girtan shot at him.

"Six minutes, perhaps seven; it cannot be longer! I came here so swiftly, Señor Girtan, that police from one end of town to the other screamed at me and sought to pursue my little car. I stood there, then, and watched the tender, and in it I saw women struggling violently—two of them, that is, while the third, the Señora Barton, sat and wept!"

A groan escaped her husband.

"I stood astounded, unbelieving!" Alvarez raced on dramatically. "Havara, the contractor, was there as well, enjoying his view with his binoculars. I snatched them from him! I looked more closely! I am here!"

"And it's the last place for us to be!" Hemmett snarled as he dashed into the library—and out of the library—and to the terrace overlooking the harbor. When, with the exception of Domez, who still cowered in his corner, they came to his side, Hemmett's glasses were focusing on mid-harbor.

Nor had Alvarez erred! Ten seconds and the powerful lenses were cutting cleanly the deck of El Fuego, first of the new destroyers.

Smoke belched from the three short funnels; anchors were already up, and the boat already in motion; and on the deck, in plain sight of all who cared to look, was the brilliant spot that must be Carmen's opera-cloak.

And there, gowned in gray, was the form of a middle-aged woman, too—yes, and just coming into sight, led by a white man who could be none other than William Jones, was a young woman in a

long white cloak. Her features he could not see at the distance, nor was there any need of seeing them.

Mercedes Tesoro was an intimate of the Hemmett household; since the early part of the season Hemmett had seen that same white cloak, wide and voluminous, spreading at the bottom! It was Mercedes!

"You're right!" Hemmett said briefly. "He has them there and—and he means to carry out the program he threatened. Come!"

"We'll never catch them in your motor-boat!" Girton cried, running beside him to the steps and the street.

"Never, and we couldn't get aboard if we did, Steve!" said Hemmett. "But we'll get them—we'll get 'em or—is that your car, Alvarez?"

"At the service of yourselves!"

"Yacht-club dock, and go like the devil!" Hemmett directed as he leaped in.

There was a roar from the motor—and for a time the two most eminent Americans in Guanama had left their home neighborhood. Just why Alvarez failed to dash them to bits on the steep hill passes explanation; now and then his light car left the ground altogether, bounding crazily from one side of the street to the other; now and then, turning a corner, it seemed that they were about to leave the vehicle altogether and hurtle through the windows of a home.—and yet Alvarez had not lost his smile when they came to the level part of town and, with Girton jabbing incessantly at the horn, broke every speed law ever laid down for the regulation of Puerto Carlo traffic!

The business section merely flitted past, and then the poorer residential quarter. Out there in the twilight the harbor stretched away mysteriously, with every now and then a glimpse of El Fuego steaming straight for the open sea.

Hemmett, jaws set, was ready to leap at the yacht-clubhouse before the car had even slowed down, and, cheerfully aban-

doning his property, Alvarez darted after at Girton's side.

There was a certain mistaken attendant who came forward, smiling and bowing and smirking, to welcome the eminent members. Because of his error in bowing directly before Hemmett, he picked himself up from the far corner of the big assembly room, vaguely of the impression that a tropical earthquake had taken place; and while he was still sitting on the floor Edward Hemmett had leaped into the beautiful cedar boat and was working over the engine, while Alvarez and Girton dragged back the canvas cover. And they were off!

Spray whirling up in a white mass, settling then until it seemed that a sheet of clear glass stood high above either side of the speed-boat, the expensive, exquisite craft whirled out into the harbor with Hemmett camped grimly behind its automobile steering-wheel. Just once Girton managed:

"Where?"

"Destroyer — Pavoroso!" Hemmett shouted. "Only thing—afloat around—here that'll catch her!"

Then he pushed spark and throttle forward to their last notch and bent his head before the wind; and so they whizzed down Puerto Carlo harbor and directly to the side of the Pavoroso, companion destroyer to the El Fuego!

But two or three sailors were visible, languid and not greatly interested until the speed-boat came directly alongside. As the motor stopped, however, the trio above quickened and grew visibly excited and expectant of—just what?

Mr. Hemmett would have given much to know as he climbed the short Jacob's ladder, cast one backward glance at Alvarez, busy with securing the motor-boat, and barked:

"Mozo! Where is he?"

"*El capitan*, señor? He is ashore," the sailor nearest responded.

"So much the better! You're in command of the craft, Steve! Drill any man who disobeys or tries to leave. Alvarez!"

"Señor?"

"Get into the wireless-house quick! If there's nobody on duty, stay there and keep every one out. If there is any one there, see that he doesn't work the apparatus. Where's the engine-room? I see!"

And having apparently taken over the boat for his own purpose these last twenty seconds, he was gone!

He had been aboard the *Pavoroso* on the day of her first coming, when the reception was tendered, and he had agreed heartily at the time that *Guanama* had acquired the fastest thing in destroyers—and he remembered the general layout.

So it came that, reaching the chief engineer's office in rather less than another twenty seconds, Mr. Hemmett walked in and snapped his fingers at the portly, ornately uniformed official who smoked in the easy chair!

"You, Rodero! How much steam have you?"

"Steam, señor? Oh, it is the Señor Hemmett?" said the *Pavoroso's* chief, and the queer insolence he had seen in other quarters was before Hemmett again. "I had thought, señor, that you had left *Guanama*. No?"

"Steam! Steam!"

"What? A pound or two, perhaps. No more. The fires are banked, señor, and— Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm interested. Snatch down that telephone and tell 'em to have a running head of steam in those boilers as quick—"

"Oh, but my good Señor Hemmett!" the chief smiled flatly and impudently. "How can it be that one accepts orders from yourself? Our new president has appointed you the secretary of the navy, perhaps, or given you command of the *Pavoroso*?"

"I'll tell you how it can be that one accepts orders from me," the caller explained as his automatic pressed directly over the chief's heart, as the chief himself turned white abruptly, raised heavy arms hastily. "I can't waste time explaining

the matter, Rodero, but I can tell you one thing: you'll have this boat running under a full head of steam without losing more than one second, or I'll kill you and take charge of this end myself! Which?"

He was, of course, insane! The chief engineer, who entertained a hearty respect for armed lunatics, did indeed snatch down his telephone; and the sincerity of the words he uttered into it almost warmed Hemmett's chilling heart. And, having uttered them, he dropped back in his chair, scared and perspiring, and the cold blue of Edward Hemmett's eye drilled through his very soul!

"El Fuego has just started out of the harbor, bound for—I don't know where," said the owner of the eye. "We're going to overhaul her or blow up this boat; and if through any fault of yours we do neither, *you* will not come back! You know me pretty well, Rodero. If you want to take a chance on any tricky stuff, take it!"

Below coal was rattling and shovels scraping—and if Rodero knew Mr. Hemmett it was more certain that Hemmett knew Rodero. In the well-filled ranks of full-blown Guanaman cowards Rodero was among the brighter lights. Judging by his present expression, the odds that he would try disobedience were perhaps one to five hundred, and Hemmett accepted them with a grunt and hurried back to the deck.

Girton, after a fashion, had taken command. Some thirty of the crew were standing there, regarding him silently as he addressed them—too silently and in a surly fashion that was far from reassuring.

Touched by the unusual mood that had grown so curiously prevalent, the crowd looked downright ugly. Girton turned to his friend and snapped, in English:

"Safe to risk it with this gang?"

"Is there any other way of risking it?"

"But yes, señor!" Alvarez put in unexpectedly. "There is indeed another way, for even I can be of assistance!

Even though it be possible, I pray that you do not start until I return."

He had left them! He had gone over the side like a monkey and was down in Hemmett's motor-boat and backing away from the long, thin destroyer. Somewhat dazedly Hemmett watched him go, wondered just where he might be heading, observed that he was making directly for his own docks, and turned to find that the destroyer's crew, on their own initiative, had moved forward in a body!

"What did you say to them, Steve?" Hemmett asked.

"I told them that we were going to sea, and that they were under my orders—and they hardly made a sign, one way or the other! One of the devilish little petty officers laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and that was about all."

"And if they try anything rough, there'll be three of us to handle thirty or forty of them, providing that Alvarez gets back!" Hemmett muttered.

He turned and peered through the thickening twilight to the harbor mouth and the Atlantic beyond. The stern of *El Fuego* was just vanishing as she headed down the coast, and behind her lay a heavy trail of black smoke. It may not have been a sob that escaped Hemmett; it was at any rate a sound that caused Girton's hand to rest rather suddenly on his arm and Girton to say:

"Don't let yourself think about it, I know that sounds ridiculous, but it's the only way to keep from going mad just now. When I looked at that crew and saw the way some of them were looking at me, and considered the way a Guanaman crew ought to look at one of us—why, for a second or two, I was on the very verge of pulling the gun, wiping out such of the little rats as I could, and then going down in a fight with the rest. That's the sort of mental state we'll have to avoid, old man, if we're ever—if we're ever—"

He himself had to pause for a moment. Hemmett breathed deeply.

"Well, we're going to bring the girls back or we're not coming back ourselves, if that's what you mean," he said. "This little pest-hole of a country has never beaten us yet, Steve, and it can't beat us now."

"But it's closer to it at this minute than it has ever come before!" Girton smiled bitterly.

Side by side they gazed through the gloom toward the Alvarez dock. The speed-boat had disappeared long before this, and the smoke-clouds overhead were growing very dense. In a very few minutes the gages below would show a head of steam; and if Alvarez had not reappeared when there was pressure enough to send the engines into action, there would be two men against the crowd instead of three!

Although, from the thick evening mists near the Alvarez dock, that gentleman, himself certainly seemed to be returning now. The foggy white spot was the spray of the speed-boat, but the spray and the motion of the craft behind it were different now. Ordinarily Mr. Hemmett's marine wonder almost soared over the surface of the water—whereas it was almost wallowing now! Its owner and his friend stepped to the other rail and strained their eyes.

"She's loaded down, Steve!" Hemmett muttered.

"Yes, and with men," breathed the retired secretary of war. "Look at it! There must be fifteen of them jammed up forward—and there are as many more aft."

Silently they watched, and, be it admitted, thrilled a little! If it was a relief expedition, Alvarez was a wonder! He had been gone, all told, perhaps eight minutes, and now he was coming alongside again, the high-speed engine hammering viciously under its unusual load.

And now it had ceased hammering, and the crew of the *Pavoroso* were streaming aft; and Alvarez, before them, threw out his hands and smiled a glorified smile.

"It is done, señores!" he reported. "To sacrifice the beautiful boat is a sin, yet we cannot drown these pigs who have elected to laugh at the great Señor Girton! You will stand back, señores?"

It was more than a request, and they were already standing back; for over the side of the Pavoroso swarmed uncouth men—great, husky men, picked for their jobs as heavy-weight dock-workers, large, tough men in shirts and flapping linen trousers, who went to work without one second's delay as Alvarez, their employer, barked commands!

The general sense gained by Hemmett and Girton during those dizzying seconds was that the Pavoroso's regular crew was being ordered into, and then thrown bodily, into the speed-boat. Fists flew here and there for a moment; some one fired a shot and, thanks to a dreadful uppercut from a brown fist, toppled over the side with the smoking pistol still in his hand!

A white-faced little officer, evidently first assistant engineer, came trotting to report that steam was up and the anchors weighing—nor had he more than stammered the words and hurried away than the quiver of engines shook the vessel.

And fifty yards astern the packed motor-boat, with its yelling, snarling passengers, drifted toward the shore.

The Pavoroso shook again. The fifty yards widened suddenly. The chase was on!

CHAPTER XV.

A SHELL ACROSS THE BOWS.

SUCH is the psychological distinction between motion and the lack of motion, Girton and Hemmett felt their spirits rising higher with every turn of the high-powered engines.

Carmen, Mercedes, and Barton's wife might be in a position quite as perilous as heretofore, or even more perilous if Jones chanced to resent the pursuit, but at least help was coming nearer to them every minute now.

The destroyer surged out between the crescent points of the harbor and headed south in the brilliant light of the rising tropical moon before they quite realized that the thing had been accomplished and that Alvarez was missing.

He turned up suddenly, smiling.

"All seems well, señores!" he reported briskly.

"Eh?"

"I have visited every part of the vessel save the engine-room, which seems to be working nicely. There are on deck no more than six or seven of the crew, for many were ashore on leave, and these six or seven, having felt the hands of my men, are humble and willing to obey!"

"You're—you're a wonder, Alvarez!" Girton muttered.

"To serve yourselves, señores, that is a joy," the younger man stated, with a smile. "Later, perhaps, these men of mine will be of further service, and upon them you may depend, for they are tried and true fighters, loyal to me, which means loyal to yourselves. I speak, they obey. What is next to be done?"

There was something distinctly helpful about Alvarez, with his excited smile and his utter confidence in the force he had precipitated so astonishingly on the destroyer Pavoroso. Looking at him, it was rather difficult to believe that all would not end well—and Hemmett even smiled faintly.

"It might be as well for both of us to leave this rail and give up trying to see a vessel already out of sight," he said, "and find out just what we've got aboard. How's the wireless man, Alvarez?"

"Small and easily cowed!" Alvarez reported. "He was smoking in his little cabin, señor, when we came aboard, with the telephones on his ears and evidently expecting something. You will now find him somewhere outside his cabin, and here is the key. You will take it?"

"I may need it," and Hemmett dropped it into his pocket. "We'll leave

you in charge of the deck Alvarez, and see the navigating officer. The ship isn't steering herself, I take it."

"Young Arturo Polito is in charge. You remember him?"

"Guanama's professional fat boy, eh?" Girton said. "I remember him very well. He graduated from our naval college; I remember that, too, because I indorsed his application."

Hemmett at his side, he walked to the wheel-house and opened the door. Polito was indeed its only tenant—a very plump and sleepy-eyed young brown man, good-natured as ever. They greeted him with mingled emotions, for he—among some thousands of others—had much cause to be loyal to Guanama.

"So you were in it, too, eh?" Mr. Hemmett observed.

"In it and out of it again, señor, apparently," said the second officer of the Pavoroso quite easily. "Many strange things have happened recently in our navy, señor—things about which one may ask questions and learn nothing. I had intended, in another week or two, to ask for my discharge and join my father in business; for I do not like strange things.

"And now, a few minutes gone, the excellent Señor Alvarez points a pistol and informs me that on pain of death we are to catch El Fuego. So now—"

"If you understand that much, you've got it all, Polito," Girton said sharply. "Can we overhaul the boat?"

"It is possible; it is not likely," Polito said placidly as he kindled a fresh cigarette. "On the trials, you know, El Fuego averaged the tenth part of a mile better than this vessel. That is the difference."

"Then get busy with your engine-room telegraph and see if the Pavoroso can't make that extra tenth herself and a little more. *Because we're going to overhaul El Fuego!*"

His steady eye bored into the large, cowl-like orbs of Polito; some ten seconds Polito studied the gaze and the face of the man behind it; and then, with a little shiver, he nodded.

"Yes, señor!" said he, plainly convinced. "If it be within human power, we are to overhaul El Fuego. Be assured of my poor best efforts to that end."

He picked up the speaking-tube and took to shouting, energetically and sincerely, as Rodero had shouted to his fire-room force! Hemmett and Girton, a little easier, left him and walked forward, where Alvarez already peered into the night ahead.

"I have ordered the search-light manned," he reported. "It is one of the wonders of the navy, this Pavoroso search-light. With it and the moon, we shall soon pick up El Fuego, I think."

He was wrong. The search-light, flaring out after another two or three minutes, swept the water ahead all in vain. East of their path it went and west, through painful minutes. There was no sign of El Fuego. Half an hour had gone, then—and abruptly a pencil of light rose on the skyline dead ahead, rose and disappeared again.

"That's it!" Mr. Girton exclaimed.

"And they're making for the open sea—they're heading east!" added his friend.

"In that, señor, I think you are wrong," Alvarez smiled. "I have had speech with one Barra, head of the fire-room. He spoke freely to me, señor, for we are old friends. It is said by Barra that the other destroyer is making straight for Parilla to take on coal!"

"Eh?"

"And I think that this is true, señor, because coal for El Fuego is lying at my own dock and was to have been taken aboard to-morrow."

"And the bunkers here?"

"They are full, señor."

"Well, that sounds something like!" Girton exclaimed. "That ought to mean that we'll overhaul them before midnight."

"Before eleven, I should say, señor," Alvarez answered cheerfully.

Again their anxious hearts quickened; again, as the search-light was switched

off at last, they took to peering through the soft moonlight reaches.

They were doing all that lay within the Pavoroso; several trips below at regular intervals proved that much. Whatever Rodero's affiliation with the plot that bade fair to make Guanama the ranking traitor nation of history the chief engineer was accepting this evening at its full face value.

The periodical visits below of Hemmett may have had something to do with it, or the three square-jawed, tattered stevedores who stood about the engine-room; at any rate, it was certain that another pound of steam would rend the boilers.

They had been heading south for an hour—and now they had been heading south for two hours and more; and, despite his best efforts, fear was creeping into the heart of each man, that Alvarez had been wrong, and that El Fuego was not bound for Parilla and coal. Her search-light, after that one flash, had not reappeared; and terrified pessimism was working its way to Girton's lips when Alvarez cried suddenly:

"There, señores! There! See! The smoke to starboard! She is running not a mile from the coast! Do you see?"

The moon was coming from a five-minute obscurity behind thick, scurrying clouds, and through the growing light they strained their eyes again—and El Fuego was there, surely enough! Plowing along far, far ahead, that thin, dark spot with the thin, white wake must be El Fuego—and Hemmett fairly bounded into the wheel-house and hurled at the sleepy-eyed Polito:

"She's over there! Can we pick her up with the search-light!"

"It should be possible, señor."

"Try it!"

Tense seconds, and the white stream shone across the rolling ocean, nosed about for a bit, and rested steadily upon the destroyer ahead; and to their excited eyes it seemed that, even in the seconds, El Fuego had lost ground.

She was nearer by quarter of a mile—

or was it only two hundred yards?—or was it anything at all? Mr. Hemmett gave it up, and dashed toward the wireless-house, where the philosophical operator still sat upon the step and smoked.

"Wake up!" he shouted. "Here! The door's open—get in there and call El Fuego!"

"A message, señor?" the operator said calmly.

"A message for Jones—yes, I see that you know Jones. Get him, you, and tell him to stop, that's all! Tell him to stop or we'll sink him, my man, and remember that I'm standing here beside you, and that I spent several years in wireless work, and that if you begin sending code or anything else mysterious you'll go overboard and I'll do the sending myself."

Considering that his one attempt to learn the mysteries of the Continental wireless alphabet had been a dismal failure, the statement was a slight exaggeration; yet it went well enough.

The operator had absorbed some of this evening's atmosphere aboard the destroyer; he seated himself obediently and set his quenched spark-gap to hissing and crackling softly. He adjusted his tuning apparatus and waited. Once more he called—once more he waited and this time he smiled slightly.

"They are listening," he reported. "They refuse to take a message!"

"How can they?" Hemmett snapped.

"How can one force them to take a message, when the telephones are thus easily removed?" the operator smiled blandly, laying aside his own.

"You put those back on your head and send them a message, whether they acknowledge it or not!" commanded Mr. Hemmett. "Tell Jones to stop or we'll sink him—yes, and I'll put an added point to it, too!"

He dashed off again, leaving the operator pressing resignedly at his key. He found Girton and Alvarez where he had left them.

"We'll send one shot across their bows!" he announced. "What is this affair—three-inch rifle?"

"Yes, the new type," Girton assented. "Five charges in the small magazine at the base and probably a couple of hundred more below."

"One will do for us. Firing her is your job, Steve. Can you get the range?"

"In a minute or two," said Girton, without great enthusiasm.

He could not forget that Mercedes Tesoro was a prisoner aboard *El Fuego*; he could not drive from his mind the fact that this was the ocean, and that his really deep artillery study of recent years had been all upon land.

Up at Las Almas, in the training days of the army, both as an example and because the practise interested him deeply, the secretary of war had personally piled up a score at the targets which still stood unmatched; but this—well, this was different.

Still, he went to work, and Alvarez at his side watched every move absorbedly, drinking in each little detail with that overwhelming interest that had gone so far toward making his own success.

"Ready!" Girton announced simply.

"Let her go!"

There was a flash and a roar and a shock that set the slender bow of the *Pavoroso* to quivering—and six hands clasped at the rail while six eyes darted down the path of the search-light to *El Fuego*. And a cry escaped three mouths, for there was a splash and a spurt of white water just ahead of the other destroyer—and *El Fuego*, even when they had stared, hardly breathing, through another minute, showed no signs of coming to a standstill!

"Didn't they see it?" Hemmett muttered wonderingly.

"They saw it fast enough, but Jones is aboard that boat," said Girton. "We needn't stop at that. I've got the range business down to a hair's breadth."

"Well?"

"The next one goes through her engine-room, Ned!"

"To sink her?" gasped Mr. Hemmett.

"She will not sink," Girton smiled.

"She'll stop, though, and they'll shut her water-tight compartments in a hurry, and by the time they've been shut we ought to be alongside and boarding her."

Alvarez, all enthusiasm, all faith, was even now drawing out another shell and another firing charge; and although the very notion sent chills up and down Hemmett's spine, he offered no objection. Teeth set, he watched Girton tinker his range-finder delicately, almost unbreathingly—and the wireless man was beside them with a fluttering bit of paper.

"They have answered, señor!" he cried. "I have sent as you requested, and they have replied."

Edward Hemmett snatched the paper from him and held it in the faint reflected light from the search-light. It was addressed to himself and it read:

"The women are lashed to the after-deck. The boats and every man on board are ready to leave. If you wish to sink *El Fuego*, sink her!"

CHAPTER XVI.

JONES COMES ABOARD.

"YOU are ready, señor?" Alvarez was saying tensely.

"You watch the spot beside their engine-room and you'll see—" Mr. Girton was just beginning.

"Well, *don't!*" Hemmett shouted. "You—you—here, wireless! Get back there and say—say nothing at all until I give the word!"

Girton turned somewhat blankly from his gun.

"What now?"

"Jones says that all hands are ready to leave, Steve—which means that if you put a hole through her they won't bother with the compartments. And the women are lashed down tight!"

The gunner's enthusiasm cooled ab-

ruptly. His hands dropped and he smiled bitterly.

"Jones always seems to have something ready, doesn't he? His coal's giving out, too, and he's slowing down. Look at that!"

"Yes, and since he's so handy with the ultimatum stuff, I'll have a try at it myself!" Hemmett stormed. "We'll be alongside in another five minutes, and I'm going to warn him that—"

He broke off and sped after the radio man. He found that person sitting before his instruments, telephones already adjusted, and smiling interestedly. The operator held up a restraining hand.

"A moment, señor!" he cried softly. "More is coming now."

His pencil scratched ahead, and Hemmett, scowling over his shoulder, watched the words and damned his own earlier lack of persistence in matters telegraphic. His mind would have been easier could he have but read those clicks and buzzes, audible even with the telephones on the man's head.

"We are coming to anchor," grew swiftly to: "You will drop anchor at least five hundred yards astern. Should you fail to do this, or should you choose in any way to attack El Fuego, the women will be shot in cold blood before you can possibly reach us."

This time the signature of "William Jones" was added; and, having scrawled it, the operator looked up.

"They have signed off, señor," he reported. "That is the end of the message."

Without a comment, Mr. Hemmett snatched it from the table and left the little cabin. A moment only he hesitated as, at the door of the wheel-house, he gazed across the black water; El Fuego was gliding to a full stop, and they were coming very, very near to her now.

The distance between was surely less than half a mile, and should Jones happen to estimate it as less—Mr. Hemmett barked an order at Polito which set the engine-room telegraph going sud-

denly, and hurried to his friend, still in the bow, still gazing at El Fuego.

"They've stopped," Girton said superfluously. "What's the matter with this tub? Engines busted?"

"We're stopping, too," Mr. Hemmett snarled. "Here, read it!"

Glasses were not needed now to watch El Fuego. The moon had disappeared again, and the search-light showed the motionless destroyer against a background of solid, impenetrable black—and showed as well the bustling about toward the stern, where hung the gasoline tender.

Whatever their purpose, they were making ready to lower away the little boat. Men were scrambling in, to the number of half a dozen, Guanaman sailors all by their uniforms; then, distant and tiny, the figure of Jones advanced and climbed into the tender, and after him a man in civilian togs whom they had not seen before. The tender slid to the black water, and they caught the faint hum of the engines.

"I've read it," Girton muttered as his eyes went back to El Fuego. "He's coming aboard here!"

"Yes, and the other boats are swung out from El Fuego, and she's settling, too!" said Hemmett.

"Settling?"

"Look at her. She hasn't taken on any cargo since we started, Steve—but she's half a foot lower in the water."

Silently they studied the new phenomenon for a little, while the tender hummed through the night toward them. It had covered half the distance before Girton, coming to the end of a new train of thought, spoke softly:

"Alvarez!"

"Yes, señor?" and the younger man came closer.

"Have them drop that long boat on the port side, and have it done quick! Then pick me a dozen of your men who can *scrap*! See?"

"I understand, señor. And then?"

"You've dealt them out the pistols from the arsenal below?"

"They are all armed, señor."

"Then I'm going to take them over and officially capture El Fuego as soon as Jones sets foot on this deck!" Mr. Girton said simply. "If I ever stand here and look at him and think about the girls—"

Hemmett nodded quickly.

"I had thought of the same thing," he said. "Take Alvarez with you and beat it, Steve! I'll have the search-light kept off the water, and when you've matters in your own hands start the wireless. Make dots and nothing else; you can manage that?"

"Inasmuch as I've been giving lessons in field wireless—yes."

"And if you need help, simply point the search-light at the sky and leave it there, because I shall be able to quit Jones and come to help you about three minutes after he has boarded us."

"You're not going to slaughter the man?"

"Heaven forbid!" Mr. Hemmett said grimly. "I'm going to hang on to myself, if I can, until I see who's with him and hear what he has to say—and I think I can."

The Pavoroso's search-light switched around, to reveal the tender not fifty yards distant and making gracefully for the destroyer. Hemmett bit off the words—and Stephen Girton was gone! He heard Girton cross the dock, heard the soft pattering of many feet and the creak of pulleys and, presently, the faintest little splash.

Mr. Hemmett stepped to the man at the search-light and snapped an order; his white beam rose and hung over the top of El Fuego in purposeless fashion; and up from the starboard landing-stage, in the most matter-of-fact fashion, William Jones was stepping to the deck of the destroyer!

Calmer or more pleasantly smiling no man could have been! An assured, lazy little swagger was in his walk, and his shoulders swung to it. Behind him in the faint illumination of the destroyer's

deck-lights stood a short, thickset Guamanian; and for an instant, as he viewed the latter, Hemmett's fury at Jones almost subsided, for that was José Canita, new president of the National Bank of Guanama, a millionaire who ranked almost with Fernandez, a mighty hidden power in the darker, more mysterious depths of politics and sometimes mentioned as the most powerful one man in all Guanama.

Low-browed, pig-eyed, oily, he smiled directly and significantly at Edward Hemmett; and in less than five seconds Hemmett felt queerly he had learned more about the plot, more about the recent elections, than he had ever known before!

"Our dear Mr. Hemmett, eh?" Jones observed easily. "Oh, you know the excellent Canita, don't you? I wish you wouldn't look at him just like that, Hemmett; it isn't politic. He might insist on having you taken back and sentenced to death by one of his pet judges, or something like that. Where's dear Stephen Girton?"

"He didn't come!" Hemmett snapped. "Well?"

"Didn't he, really?" Jones smiled. "Is Stephen's superb vitality ebbing, that he funk'd the spectacular chase? I could have sworn that he'd be with you, ready to eat the whole world raw, and—hello! What the devil kind of crew have we here?" he concluded, with genuine interest, as he gazed at the tattered group of overdeveloped dock workers that hovered near.

"That's the substitute crew," Hemmett said. "They'll let you alone unless—"

"Oh, they'll let me alone without any 'unless,'" Jones assured him. "Well, Mr. Hemmett? You're calmer, I observe. That's nice. You've been looking at El Fuego, I believe, these last minutes? Is it necessary to outline the situation in mere words?"

"It is not," Canita's rasping accent put in. "You are not a fool, Señor

Hemmett. You are ready *now*, I think, to do the wise thing? The wonderful Señor Jones will *still* guarantee that you and the women shall be delivered safely at the Isthmus! It is most generous. It is more than I should do!"

"Because, if that bull-headed dementia still possesses you, the little game will end here and now, Hemmett," Jones pursued. "Upon my word, you don't seem very intelligent after all. Do you quite realize that the sea-cocks on El Fuego are open and water coming into her hull at the rate of an inch every minute or so? Haven't your eyes told you that my men are in the boats, ready to leave when the boats themselves come to the water level? Don't you really believe that your ladies are trussed to the rail over there, Hemmett?"

He sauntered nearer and looked at Mr. Hemmett interestedly.

"*Now*, you've got about ten minutes to decide," he explained. "Guanama doesn't need you, Hemmett—you or Girton. Neither does the—er—railroad which I have the honor to represent. I'll still let you have your ladies, intact. I'll take you to the yacht I mentioned, aboard this very boat, Hemmett. And please don't glare! You're a dreadful and desperate character, *but* all by my little self I still have you where the hair is very short.

"You can't give a particle of assistance to the unfortunately sinking El Fuego, old chap, because you can't get there! Even if your whole somewhat shabby-looking crew here were to pile into the small boats, it would really avail nothing at all, because my own crew have orders to fire on everything and anything, my own tender excepted, that comes in sight. You take the general sense of the argument, I'm sure!

"Now, what I propose is this: you will come with me to El Fuego as hostage. We'll get the ladies, and we'll get my crew. Your own remarkable crowd here will put out for the shore. And then we'll turn around and steam back to

Puerto Carlo, and you'll have a pleasant trip on a nice yacht, just as soon as I've had Mr. Girton sandbagged and brought aboard.

"And you'll have the positive assurance that if you ever show your faces again in Guanama you'll be shot on sight! Do I seem to exaggerate? It is a wrong impression, believe me. Sweeping changes are coming in Guanama—oh, so soon! Well?"

These last few seconds Hemmett had been straining his ears for sounds across the water. When they came, something inside informed him, there were certain things which he would do in a fraction of time less than measurable. But they had not come yet.

"And the fact that we are American citizens, Jones—" he began.

"That's old stuff—dreary old stuff these days!" Jones said impatiently. "If you're nasty, you'll be dead citizens, you know; and, dead or alive, you may be entirely sure that no credible word will ever come to your precious United States.

"If you live and raise a rumpus, you'll find officially that you were expelled from Guanama for arson or grand larceny or something of the sort. If you die—pouf! I control every means of communication out of Guanama! I control every newspaper in the country! I con—"

Across the water a wild chorus of yells rose suddenly—and wilder than any of them was Edward Hemmett's own yell aboard the Pavoroso.

"Here's where one swelled head is *smashed!*" thundered Mr. Hemmett as he plunged at Mr. Jones.

CHAPTER XVII.

SEA-COCKS AND ACCIDENTS.

SLIPPING across the black water, Stephen Girton gazed hard at the moon and drew a breath of relief. That cloud was growing thicker toward the

center, and the moon would remain behind it for all of fifteen minutes. And he seemed to have left the Pavoroso without attracting attention.

Jones was aboard, too, by this time. His tender was bobbing at the ladder, and Girton held his breath once more as he watched the three or four sailors in her and prayed fervently that the almost inaudible plashing of oars might not reach them across that bare two hundred feet of black water.

And then he eased, for they were quite absorbed in their own chatter; smoking, laughing, they sat about the engine pit—and now the danger virtually was over.

And the job that lay ahead was not exactly without danger! Behind him were some dozen of Alvarez's men, armed, fighters by preference; but on El Fuego what might he find?

The little destroyers were always undermanned, and shore-leave, prompted by universal sympathy with the Guanaman thirst, was a chronic evil of the navy—but it was entirely possible that forty or fifty armed men were awaiting his coming!

Not that it mattered very much, save as concerned the chances of quick success. With Mercedes aboard El Fuego, the powers of evil themselves would only have invited Mr. Girton to battle to-night! He whispered, ordering a little more speed; he looked very thoughtfully at the faces about him; and then, glancing up at the lights, he noted that they were fairly under the stern of El Fuego and sliding around to the starboard side and the ladder.

And just overhead now! Why, men were swarming out of the small boats there. They had been detected at last and they were bumping the side; and his own men were rising as one—and Mr. Girton, automatic in hand, bounded up the ladder to El Fuego's deck!

The very suddenness of his advent seemed to have paralyzed those nearest him. Teeth bared, gun for the moment

forgotten, the pent-up emotions of the evening exploded within Stephen Girton. There was a dark face near and a rifle-barrel; his fist obliterated the dark face, and the rifle flew overboard. And behind him there were yells and the jostling of his own men and a shot or two—and after that, for a little, Hades itself broke loose!

Although for Girton it was a joyful infernal region! His fists were swinging and swirling, pounding and hammering ecstatically! Men were yelling and men were falling; in a twinkling instant he saw Raporta, first officer of El Fuego, narrow-eyed and savage, fire a shot at one of the dock workers—saw the first officer lifted bodily and sent crashing to the deck, senseless—saw a knife coming in his own direction, and heard the crazy scream as he gripped the arm and all but tore it from its socket—saw Patero mightiest of the stevedores as three men dragged at him—saw Patero hurl one out of sight along the deck, and the other bodily into the near, out-hanging cutter—saw him grip the neck of the third and squeeze and shake until the bulging-eyed face vanished from Mr. Girton's ken in a new surge of battle.

Another knife was coming his way, and he leaped toward it and laughed madly—for his very expression seemed to have frightened the senses out of this latest member of El Fuego's crew, and he had thrown away the knife and was running to the side—saw three more coming at him, head down, and leaped at them as well, bleeding fists hurling at them like two triphammers!

There was, perhaps, nothing really civilized or intellectually uplifting in any of it; but the fact remained that, all things considered, Stephen Girton had not enjoyed himself so thoroughly in a long, long time!

And then—why, he was slamming and punching at the empty air, and a dock-man, with one eye closed and a cheek badly cut, was grinning at him and saying:

"Enough, señor! They have fled! Sec, one and all, they have gone, and those that could not flee were thrown after, into the boats!"

"Eh?" stammered Mr. Girton.

"And the women, señor! They have been liberated and they are unharmed, for—"

He said no more. Girton, in one second, had come to his senses—had looked about swiftly—and had Mercedes Tesoro in his arms!

It was a heart-stopping moment. The civilized element in Girton welled up, and, silently and fervently, he gave up thanks as he pressed the frightened, sobbing girl to him.

It was the first tear that Mercedes had shed since that astounding moment at the foot of the garden, as these were the first tears of Carmen Hemmett, standing by Mrs. Barton and striving to still the hysteria that had afflicted the older lady ever since the beginning of the amazing adventure.

Stephen Girton returned to life quite suddenly. Patero, white and breathless still, was tapping his arm.

"Señor!" he said. "The vessel is sinking!"

"What?"

"It is said by Miguélo that the sea-cocks have been opened. He would ask if the señor would know how they may be closed?"

Girton, blinking, bit his lips.

"I—I don't know!" he confessed. "Get the search-light into action and—"

"If it needs electricity, señor, it is impossible," said Patero. "Water is in the fire-rooms and the engine-room. This much I have seen, but if there be other power, perhaps—"

"If there is, I don't know how to find it!" Girton told him. "I'm no marine engineer, and—" Unusual man that he was, in the vastness of his relief he laughed outright. "We'll have to take to the boats and get back to the Pavoroso."

"And that, too, is impossible, for the

boats are gone, even to the one in which we came!" said the dockman energetically. "And more evil than this has been the act of the crew, señor! To the last life-belt, every means of keeping afloat has been cast overboard! It was the work of murderers, and we should have understood when we saw the two chests hurled into the sea, but in the great turmoil—"

Girton's laugh had died altogether. So had Mercedes's excited flood of words, up to this minute continuing in spite of Patero. A tremendous stillness seemed to settle on the deck of *El Fuego*.

"Do you mean to say," Girton demanded thickly, "that this thing's going down, and that we have no means of getting off?"

"With the shore two miles away, señor."

"Then yell!" cried Mr. Girton. "Yell like blazes for help, and—"

Patero smiled forlornly.

"Help from the Pavoroso? The night wind blows squarely in our faces from that quarter, señor!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEED OF ALVAREZ.

JUST how the thing had happened, Edward Hemmett could not recall; but Jones was lying there at his feet, senseless and bruised and very unwholesome to look upon! Canita had suffered, too; Canita lay huddled down by the hatch, weeping queerly and apparently unable to move—and the senseless figure over there wore the cap of *El Fuego*, as did three others who were being held by the Pavoroso's scrub crew!

Further, Alvarez was holding his arm and saying:

"Señor! I know! I understand, but we shall settle! You would not kill the pigs with your own hands?"

"Didn't I—didn't I finish Jones?" Hemmett panted, as his vision cleared a little and familiar objects of the deck

impressed themselves on his brain once more.

"No, señor, but it shall be done, and well, and—"

"What are you doing here, anyway?" Hemmett broke in. "I thought you'd gone with Girton?"

"It was by his order that I remained behind, señor," Alvarez smiled, and Hemmett wondered vaguely at the smile! It was an unearthly sort of expression, pallid, wide-eyed; it suggested that Alvarez was seeing visions! "And we, Señor Hemmett, will go, I think, to his assistance now!"

"Eh?"

"I am not sure. I think the Señor Girton calls for help. The wind is against them now, but as it rose there were wild cries, señor, and much—"

"All right!" said Mr. Hemmett. "We'll get over there in a hurry, then. Get your men together."

"I go, señor!" and the Alvarez smile grew more peculiar with every second! "And these—dogs and traitors, even to the crew of El Fuego—we shall bind fast, that they may remain! And Polito, señor, and the boy of the wireless, we shall take them with us, and three of the fire-room force as well, for I know them, and they are less traitors than fools!"

Edward Hemmett stared after him as he flitted away. He had known Alvarez for many years as a person of vivid enthusiasms and tremendous initiative, once an idea had gripped him—yet he had never seen Alvarez carry on just like that before.

It was queer, but meditating upon it was not nearly so pleasant as watching Alvarez's men truss up William Jones and the unspeakable Canita and the snarling members of El Fuego's crew, and Hemmett turned his attention in that direction.

It was solid fact that he could not remember a single detail of the attack, but he had certainly done a thorough job on William Jones! He remembered that Carmen's face and the boy's had floated

before him just as his fingers touched the corrupter of Guanama, and that was all. And it had evidently been quite enough, and to save himself Hemmett could feel no twinge of conscience.

He smiled grimly and faced Alvarez, just speeding into sight again.

"And now to go, señor!" the younger man cried. "It is to hasten, I think, and all are ready. El Fuego's tender will hold us easily."

He led the way to the side and over it, and Hemmett followed briskly enough, his mind turning to El Fuego and what might be happening aboard her. A human stream came after them, filling the little boat, and the Pavoroso for a time was free to drift as she pleased.

Ever and anon, as he worked over the engine, Alvarez glanced back at him, smiling almost contentedly. Hemmett watched him and sighed; once in a while your excitable Guanaman goes stark, staring mad under too much emotional strain. Then his gaze wandered to the scared wireless man, to the fat young Polito, who smoked another cigarette and gazed philosophically and contentedly ahead.

Polito, by the way, should have been left in charge, and—

"We are here, and safely!" Alvarez announced.

And there was doubtless a genuine fight waiting for them! Mr. Hemmett, giving over observation of his companions, swung up to the deck and felt them swarming after him. Mr. Hemmett came face to face with his old friend Stephen Girton and three ladies—and one of them flew to Mr. Hemmett's arms with a scream of joy, and for a little he cared nothing about the impending battle nor did he even note its absence until:

"Get the women into the tender, Ned! Heaven knows I sympathize, but you two can't stand there and spoon all night. This tub's not going to float another ten minutes!"

"You say, señor—" Alvarez gasped.

"We're sinking, and that tender 'll

have to take the women over to the Pavoroso first and then come back for the rest—and great luck if some of us don't have to make the trip swimming!"

Alvarez wrung his hands.

"El Fuego sinks?" he shrieked. "She sinks! Then I—I have—"

He said no more. Off where the Pavoroso lay the ocean seemed to open wide and belch forth flame and smoke! A roar that shook the deck and seemed fairly to beat them down came within the second, and there was a queer, loud hiss. And the moon, coming at last from behind the cloud, shone on the spot where the Pavoroso had been. There was only curiously turbulent water now, with a great surging white pall of smoke overhead!

"So shall all Guanama's traitors die!" said Alvarez between his teeth.

Mr. Girton's head was just settling back on his shoulders after the blast.

"You're—responsible for that?" he gasped.

"With a time-fuse, señor, I kindled the magazine before we left!" the astonishing Alvarez cried brokenly. "It was right! It was just; for such as they, even this death was too merciful! Yet had I known—"

"Yes, had you known that you were likely to drown the whole crowd by doing it, you wouldn't have done it!" Hemmett thundered, his own senses returning. "Why, you confounded little lunatic—"

He choked. He felt that he, too, was going mad! For here came Polito, strolling toward them, cigarette and all, and smiling!

"The vessel, señor, will not sink!" the Pavoroso's officer reported placidly.

"The—the sea-cocks!" Girton stutted.

"Yes. They have been closed, of course, by the levers which lie in the upper balcony of the engine-room," Polito smiled. "Otherwise, I have also started the pumps which run by the auxiliary power astern, señor, so that in an hour or so we shall float quite easily.

And by way of reaching the shore, since the fires are dead and the engines flooded, we shall use the auxiliary electric gear, I think—the storage-battery plant in the water-tight compartment astern, provided for the emergencies of battle. It is slow, yet we shall effect a landing in Parilla before two o'clock, I believe."

Girton moved limply to his side.

"Polito," he managed, with a queer, shaky smile, "maybe you're—you're some good after all."

CHAPTER XIX.

PUTTING THINGS THROUGH.

BE it admitted that Edward Hemmett, even now, had not readjusted himself. He had bathed and shaved and breakfasted; he had slept three good hours after their return by rail from Parilla, and since Fernandez's cavalry had been around the house he had slept soundly.

So that he was thoroughly rested and fit for business again, but the calm of Guanama's big senate chamber was almost disconcerting after the things that had happened last night!

And it *was* calm! Gazing down from the speaker's desk at the hundred or more faces, Mr. Hemmett reflected that never in all its history had this hysterical gathering of Latins been so utterly calm. Here and there faces were pale, here and there faces smiled, tried to laugh, gave it up. The air was downright thick with suspense—and for cause!

So many things had happened since this time yesterday that sorting them out in any kind of sequence was downright impossible as yet. Alvarez, the indefatigable, the avenger, had reported them verbally, as Hemmett and Girton breakfasted; Alvarez had not slept, and showed no signs of wanting to sleep; for his country was to be saved, and the two Americans served in the tremendous task that had descended upon them suddenly as any thunderbolt.

For one thing, it appeared that Altara, alleged President of Guanama, had fled at dawn, after an insane hour of bargaining with Marado, late secretary of state. The upshot of the interview had been that, Marado agreeing dazedly that the recent president should not be pursued, Altara had left a signed confession in his hands, to be put to whatever use Marado or any one else elected!

As a document it was a wonder. Hastily written, even ungrammatical in spots, it breathed one panic-stricken Guanaman's desire to save himself by exposing all his accomplices; nor did it lack in the definite quality, for it gave names and dates and amounts of bribes at such length that Hemmett at least all but forgot the substantial meal before him.

News travels fast in Guanama. An hour after daylight, Alvarez stated, there had been something very like a procession of laden motor-cars making for the northern border. Puerto Carlo's three morning papers were wallowing helplessly in the trough of events, without editors or visible owners; five of the big gray army automobiles had fought for the right of way on the first hill north of the city, packed with uniforms, trunks, and gesticulating men.

Not less than eleven senators had resigned and disappeared, and it was related by Alvarez that the cruiser *Almiranta* had started out of the harbor, had been halted by some saner souls aboard, had transferred her cargo of Guanamans to the huge yacht that had followed William Jones to Puerto Carlo—and it was gone, leaving the navy shorter of officers as such and decidedly longer of good ones!

A thousand miles nearer the north pole the whole thing would have been grotesque and impossible; in Guanama it was only a little more than might have been expected, for when panic and fear strike into Guanaman circles they strike hard and spread more rapidly than any wildfire.

And now, because the senate had no speaker, and Barton had collapsed completely when his wife returned, because there had been a certain strong demand this morning in influential circles that he grip the situation instantly, Hemmett was sitting up here and looking at Guanama's senate while Stephen Girton at his side assorted documents, pushed this one forward and then that, grunted, and occasionally chuckled to himself.

Perhaps the most cheering document of all of them was the long official message from Washington, D. C., decoded now and ready to be fired broadside into the choice little collection of legislators!

The clerk was calling the roll in a small, hushed voice. Senators from the north, the south, the west, and the east answered, also in rather small, hushed voices, although here and there a consciously righteous man spoke vigorously in response to his name, and even cleared his throat impressively afterward.

The clerk turned toward Mr. Hemmett and murmured:

"There are nineteen more than we require for a quorum, señor!"

"Then we'll open the day's business!" Hemmett smiled grimly as he arose. "*Gentlemen!*"

Absolute attention was his in one second!

"The senate of Guanama has no speaker this morning," Mr. Hemmett went on. "He is in the federal prison awaiting trial on a charge of high treason.

"He will be shot. I have taken the chair, because there are things to be said which I, perhaps better than any one else, am qualified to say. Has any member an objection to offer, on parliamentary grounds or any other grounds?"

Absolute silence rewarded him. Mr. Hemmett looked significantly at one Ramon Matora, from the Las Almas district, who rose promptly and faced his brother legislators.

"I move that the most excellent and highly esteemed Señor Hemmett be ap-

pointed speaker pro tem., by acclamation!" he cried.

There was no need of any seconding. One might have fancied that, of all wishes, that nearest the hearts of the gathering was to have the excellent and esteemed Señor Hemmett for speaker pro tem. The speaker smiled acidly.

"There is much business to be transacted this morning, and that in a very short time!" he stated. "It will be transacted in an informal manner, and, once a matter of record, it will stick! The first matter concerns the recent elections. We have the confession of Altara, lately president, that fraud governed these elections from one end of Guanama to the other. Does any one wish to dispute this statement?"

Gravelike silence brooded over the senate chamber for a long minute.

"Then we'll assume that the elections were fraudulent, and if any one is contemplating disputing it later on, I may say that, up to the time I entered this chamber, one hundred and nineteen election officials had been arrested since daylight, and, with the help of the military, we hope to gather in the whole seven hundred and something before night."

A gasp ran through the assembly.

"Therefore, the first piece of informal business before the senate this morning will be to declare the late elections null and void—to declare Señor Ferrata president for another full term—and to declare illegal the election of all other officials of every sort whatsoever who came into office for the first time at the recent elections!"

"Will that stay put on a vote of this kind?" Girton asked softly.

"That 'll stay put!" Mr. Hemmett assured him. "The two best typists in Guanama are sitting right in the west retiring rooms with microphone receivers on their ears and reducing this stuff to print as it goes along. Before we leave this room the great seal of Guanama will have been stuck on it, Stephen, along

with the signatures of everybody from Ferrata down!"

Matora was on his feet again.

"Señores! Let this, too, be carried by acclamation!" he cried.

A roar of assent arose.

"You're a volatile, obliging lot!" Hemmett assured them. "Fifty-one of you have just voted yourselves out of office. Will you kindly rise and walk straight out of that door? Your predecessors are waiting to resume their seats!"

Followed five minutes of wildest confusion. The fifty-one, having gazed at one another, and, doubtless, reviewed the known events of the last few hours, moved toward the door—and through the entrance on the other side of Guanama's senate chamber entered a long file of smiling, well-dressed, unduly important brown gentlemen, mustered in by Marado, late secretary of state.

This gathering together of deposed senators had been the hysterical Marado's job, and he had done it well. Nay, he had done more, for when the room began to calm down a little he was at Hemmett's side with a bundle of papers, waving his hands and speaking:

"Observe, my dear Señor Hemmett! How I have labored! As I ate I dictated! As I rode about, gathering these gentlemen, I dictated! And now? As I enter the capitol, my splendid Zanape hands me these—ready! How I have worked for my beloved country!"

"You certainly have, old scout!" Stephen Girton agreed as he gazed at the papers over Hemmett's shoulder. "They are in good legal form, too."

"They're ready for action now, before somebody dynamites the senate chamber!" Mr. Hemmett smiled grimly. "Where's Ferrata?"

"Coming as soon as he has finished signing the official complaints demanded by the federal prison, that the multitude may be legally held, señor," beamed Marado.

Hemmett rose again. Silence came suddenly.

"*An act!*" rasped Mr. Hemmett. "An act to expel from the navy of Guanama and from the army of Guanama every officer and enlisted man who has served less than two years, and every other officer and enlisted man, whatever his period of service, who shall be unable to prove his absolute loyalty at all times past and present to Guanama!"

The clerk read it—and it was sweeping and impressive. It was indeed astonishingly impressive when one remembered that it was Marado's composition, and when it had been read a vote was taken, and the act became a law, ready for Ferrata's signature!

And again Mr. Hemmett had risen and brought down his gavel.

"Another act!" said he. "An act, this time, to declare the National Engine Works confiscated by the government of Guanama, for its own private purposes hereafter and forever, and providing that the nominal incorporators of the said engine works shall receive as indemnity the official valuation they have put on the plant—one million dollars, United States. It's worth about thirty," he added informally, "and there's no real reason for giving up that one million, but it looks better."

The act was read. The vote was taken. Guanama had another new law!

"Another act!" continued the speaker pro tem. "An act granting immunity to any resident of Guanama, upon the furnishing of a permanent bond of ten thousand dollars, who may confess voluntarily and in detail to his participation in the scheme by which Guanama was to have been the naval base of a foreign power; and further providing a penalty of life imprisonment for any such resident who may not have confessed and who may be found within the boundaries of Guanama forty-eight hours after the signing of this act!"

There was a hush after the reading of this act, and much shifting about. Several decidedly pallid faces appeared, too—yet the act became a law.

"And still another one," Hemmett intoned. "This act provides that, to the last vessel, Guanama hereby sells to the United States of America every vessel of the Guanaman navy, as it stands to-day in every particular, and at the price named in the records of the Guanaman navy as the purchase price.

"For example, your Almiranta's down as having cost seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars as second-hand junk, and that's what the United States pays for her. The fact that she's worth about six million does not figure here at all. That's somebody else's loss, but it isn't Guanama's. Get in your vote on that, Mr. Clerk!"

It came more slowly this time. There was much waving of hands and much undertone discussion—but the gavel came down, thrice and hard, in the thick of it, and they looked at Mr. Hemmett and felt the power of a great republic behind him. The Guanaman navy, as such, ceased to be!

"There's a rather sweeping bill regarding the character of men who shall be assigned to duty at the coast forts and the general cleaning up of European men and things in the army and political circles, but that 'll have to be put into better shape before we take action on it," continued the speaker pro tem. "So I think we can come to the most important piece of work of the morning, gentlemen. It is this:

"Guanama is about to have a new, and a new kind of, treaty with the United States! With the help of the American minister, we'll have it drafted and signed before night, but the general import of it is this: The government of Guanama agrees to deposit within one month the sum of one hundred million dollars with the government at Washington! Yes, I thought that would start you yelling!" smiled the speaker as he hammered his gavel.

"Suitable interest will be paid, and the money 'll be safer there than here. Should the government of Guanama, at

any future time, be found guilty of plotting against the welfare of the United States, this sum becomes immediately forfeit!

"And further, each of the coast forts will hold, permanently, one regiment of United States Coast Artillery, supplemented by whatever Guanama troops may be desired by the colonel of that regiment!

"And still further," thundered Mr. Hemmett, who was enjoying himself hugely, "should the United States, on proof of Guanama's continued good behavior, decide to resell at cost certain of the naval vessels, it is agreed that they shall be officered and partially manned by Americans! Now holler yourselves hoarse," he concluded, when the turmoil arose again, "and see what you make of it!"

The odd thing is, perhaps, that when the tumult subsided, saner, chastened minds were in the ascendency. The terms were ratified!

Guanama had been spanked!

And as foreheads were being mopped and smiling men were talking to scowling men, and hands were waving everywhere, Ferrata, president restored, hurried into the senate chamber, and Edward Hemmett stretched.

"My job's done here, Ferrata," he said simply. "Take your chair!"

CHAPTER XX.

AMERICANS AFTER ALL.

AND so the explosion in Guanama came to an end, and by evening most of the smoke had cleared away. People with too much on their minds had been leaving town all day; three steamers had cleared quite unexpectedly for Europe, laden down; trains for the north and south had been packed, too—yet now quiet was upon Puerto Carlo, and the residents were strolling down toward the plaza and the evening band concert just as usual, talking a little more animatedly, perhaps,

but otherwise moving along quite as they had moved these many years.

From the terrace of the Hemmett home the owner and Steve Girton smoked and watched them silently. They had reached the stage of weary relaxation where conversation was distasteful; just now they listened thankfully to Edward the younger's p---e from the upper floor—smiled suddenly, and waved to Carmen and Mercedes, as they appeared at the window, two young women rather paler than usual and not so prolific in dimples, yet two who were recovering splendidly from a terrible experience.

The danger was over. Guanama, ever ready for the psychological somersault, had executed a series of them this later afternoon, surrounding the house within five minutes after their return, cheering, hailing them as deliverers of Guanama, finally permitting the marine band to force its way through the howling thousands and, splitting the hot air with excited, gusty discord, to serenade them!

Just as they had always been, they were a lot of children, to be lured this way by a white stick of candy and back again by a striped one. In their lighter moments they were amusing; in their darker moods— Mr. Hemmett shook his head as he pondered and then rose to meet his father-in-law.

Fernandez, too, was decidedly weary. Business men had been besieging him all day long, some furiously proposing a league of the righteous and blameless business element, others begging hysterically that he aid them in clearing away certain recent smudges on their reputations.

"You are national heroes again, Edward," he smiled. "You and Stephen!"

"Circumstances have a way of taking the taste out of that job," Mr. Hemmett said rather sourly.

"I know, but—it was wonderful, nevertheless," murmured Fernandez. "You gripped the whole thing so amazingly, you thrust through laws even before the senators could catch their breath and

protest! Ah, yes! Guanama may well be proud of you both!"

Mr. Girton smiled.

"Considering the time we've lived here, and the money we have invested here, and all the rest of it, I'd a darned sight rather be proud of Guanama!" he remarked.

"True enough, and doubtless some day you shall be," sighed Fernandez. "Jones—*ay de mi!* it is not to be believed—Jones is dead and Canita with him, and it is said that of the corrupt five-sixths have already fled! And so Guanama is purged and purified! And you two will become citizens, as you have said!"

He waved his hands placidly. Edward Hemmett looked suddenly at Stephen Girton and discovered that Girton was eying him narrowly. And as had happened many times before, there was no

need of words between them. Mr. Hemmett smiled and shook his head.

"Well, Guanama's a great little country," he said. "We owe a lot to Guanama, and she owes a lot to us, and there are lots of things about Guanama that I like pretty well, but—I guess not!"

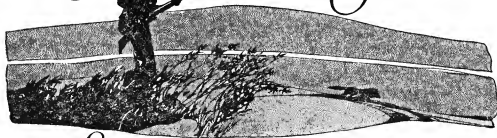
"But Edward!" cried his father-in-law. "Living here, in business here, with wives of Guanaman blood, you do not mean—"

He paused before Hemmett's steady smile. The speaker pro tem. had laid a hand upon his knee.

"I mean," said he, and the odd emotion of patriotism clogged his voice a little, "that Guanama's all right and everything else is all right. But I'm afraid that we—Steve and I—well, I'm afraid that we're just Americans, after all!"

THE END.

The Wolfers



by Courtenay Savage

I.

THE first time Bronson spoke to her Sheila McNeil decided that he was unlike any man she had ever known. He had been about the office for several days—a great, broad-shouldered

fellow whose very voice was tuned to the out-of-doors—and as accustomed as they all were to "men from the West," John Bronson was a man good to look upon as he went about his business.

There were some of the girls who laughed at him; he was not the fashion

of the figure that they worshipped in their favorite movies, but not so with Sheila. She knew in a moment that he was the type of man her ancestors had been—red-blooded individuals who did not need gaudy neckties nor suede tops to their shoes to make their women love them.

Their first conversation had taken place while Bronson was waiting to get into Mr. Hamilton's room; Bronson, as was the habit of the out-of-town men who were practically visitors, came wandering into the sales-manager's office, and stood looking down at Sheila's fingers as they scarcely touched the keys of her machine.

"Some different from the way we do things in my country."

Sheila did not answer him at once; she finished the letter, and then, looking up into his face, asked him where his country was, and if he didn't hate the city.

"Hate it?" He shrugged his shoulders. "No; only people who live in the city hate the place. Folks like I am know they don't have to stay here—it's a lark to us."

"Only people that live in cities hate them," Sheila was thinking aloud, at the same time mechanically arranging her papers for the next letter. "Yes, I think you're right; and I've lived here forever and forever."

An insistent telephone-bell called her then, and Bronson left the room. However, when he saw Hamilton, the head of the company that was disposing of his cattle for him, he asked about the little, black-eyed girl who had a desk in the room at the end of the hall.

"Who—Sheila? Why, she's Philipse's secretary. Philipse is head of the sales department, and I guess he couldn't get on without Sheila McNeil. She's been here some time, and to be truthful with you, it's rather interesting to me to watch those two. I used to think that they were in love; but I guess not, for Philipse has taken a wife—and Sheila is still—Sheila. Why did you ask about her?"

"Nothing."

"Come, Bronson—confess. You've been talking to her, and think she's the quickest, brightest little girl you've ever seen. I know—I'm an old man, but I am still able to recognize one of God's little ladies. If I wasn't afraid by the color of your face that you'd propose to her and disrupt my sales department, I'd send for her and give you a proper introduction."

"I wish you would," Bronson spoke before he realized it, and Hamilton laughed heartily.

"I will—just to prevent you from putting her over your shoulder and walking off with her. And remember, Bronson, she's a product of civilization, not a cave-woman from your native bad lands."

Hamilton pressed the button that summoned his secretary, and asked for Miss McNeil. He sat back in his chair and smiled at Bronson's efforts to be unconcerned, thinking the while that Sheila would laugh at the cattleman.

"Miss McNeil—this is Mr. Bronson." Hamilton introduced them. "He's been asking about you, and I haven't told him much. I am going to let you have first advantage, and say he's a great big boy who's never been east of St. Louis before in his life. He's got a cattle ranch and half a million dollars, a good disposition, and absolutely no knowledge of the polite way to talk to a lady."

"Oh, come, Mr. Hamilton," Bronson broke in, "I'll admit to part of that speech, but I do make objection to the end of it."

"And so do I," Sheila added. "You see, he's spoken to me already."

"Yes, and his conscience pricked him so that he demanded this introduction."

Poor Bronson! His hands twisted the pencil he had picked from Hamilton's desk, and he tried to hide his discomfort by smiling. Hamilton, his keen sense for laughable situations photographing both expressions, was thinking what a splendid story it would make to tell at the club.

"Really, it's most rude of Mr. Ham-

ilton to make fun of you—and of me," Sheila said. "If it weren't that I'd worked here for such a very long time that I know Mr. Hamilton—like—almost like a father—I'd be angry. I'm very glad to have met you, Mr. Bronson—and now I've got to run to finish Mr. Philipse's work."

"Where is Philipse?" Hamilton's mood had dropped in an instant, and the girl responded:

"He went to the Jersey yards to look over the new landing facilities they wrote about, and on the way back he'll stop at the Erie office. He's spending the day investigating railroad conditions; cheaper shipments mean cheaper deliveries."

Hamilton nodded.

"You keep close tabs on him, don't you?"

The girl replied with a quick nod—a flush slowly creeping up over her face as she turned and hurriedly left the room.

Bronson was busy the rest of the afternoon. He had much to discuss with the man who represented him in the East, and had full care of all his money transactions. There were moments, however, when he thought of the little dark-eyed girl in the sales department, and wondered if propriety allowed him to ask her to spend the evening with him. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, both of them twenty years his senior, had tried to show him the town, but just once he would like to go to a restaurant with a young woman.

He did not dance, at least not the dances that could be performed on the floor of the fashionable New York cafés; but he wanted some one who would smile at him, laugh with him, and make a fitting picture for the frame of lights and colors that was called a room.

He was still questioning his courage when Hamilton announced that he was going home.

"Coming up-town with me?" he asked, and Bronson quickly found an imaginary excuse to wait.

Other nights he had been only too anxious to get away from the bewildering

efficiency that was responsible for the firm's success. To-night he wanted to linger, and possibly speak again with Sheila.

It was almost five o'clock, and everywhere there were preparations for the end of the day, before he could summon enough courage to go into the office of the sales-manager. He passed the door twice, and finally entered. Sheila was there, but not alone.

"Oh, Mr. Bronson—come in—this is Mr. Philipse."

The two men shook hands, each quickly appraising the other.

Bronson saw a slender man of some thirty-two or three, immaculately dressed in rather flashy clothing. He did not trust the brown eyes that held his own for a short time and then moved away, and there was only contempt for the little waxed mustache.

"A stranger in the city?" Philipse asked. "I think I heard that you were to be here. How do you like it?"

"Not much," Bronson said quietly. "I've seen a few nice things since I've been here—and plenty that I don't care for."

"Isn't that true of every locality? I'm sure I should hate your native West."

Bronson nodded. The high-pitched voice with the carefully spoken words would be laughable in the land he called home. He could not help but think of the guying that this man would get if he should ever stumble upon a round-up.

"I trust you'll excuse me," Philipse kept on. "I've got to sign these letters in a hurry; my car is waiting for me. Going up-town? I'd be glad to give you a lift."

"No, thanks—I'm not quite finished for the night," and Bronson crossed to the window, out of the circle of light shed by Philipse's desk lamp.

He heard Philipse issuing orders in a peremptory tone, and wondered how it was that he dared speak to such a girl as Sheila in that manner. He shook his

head and looked out of the window, down the cañon of Beaver Street, the lighted buildings looming with a grandeur that was almost equal to the cañons he knew. He waited there till Philipse had finished, then watched him put on his overcoat and depart.

"I don't think much of that fellow," he told Sheila. "Somehow, I wouldn't trust him much more than I would a snake."

"Mr. Philipse is very, very clever," Sheila said after a second. "He's one of the best salesmen in the city."

"Salesmen—yes—but if you'd have said best man, I should have doubted the worth of your city."

The girl laughed. She was busy folding the letters, her small, thin fingers moving with a rapidity that fascinated the watcher.

"You are very frank, Mr. Bronson—most of you men who live out-of-doors are brutal about telling the truth."

"Why not? You see, nature is our real mistress; she never lies. I wonder if you'd think I was too frank if I was to say that I like you a lot, and wanted you to go out to dinner with me."

The girl sent a quick look that went straight into Bronson's eyes. For a minute their gaze was steady, and then the girl let her eyes rest on the mail she was folding.

"I don't think I ought to go, Mr. Bronson. You see, I've only just met you, and I haven't any one I could ask as a chaperon."

"Do they really have chaperons outside of books?" Bronson inquired with an amused smile. "Even if they do, I'd like just one dinner when there would be some one to talk with—that is, some one I'd like to talk with. I'm afraid I'm putting my invitation in a jumble of words—but I wish you'd eat with me."

Sheila laughed.

"You speak as if you had been lonesome these past few days."

"Lonesome? I'd never thought of it in that light, but I guess that's the

trouble. I've been hanging about with Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton—but they're old, and they don't hate the city. Why, lady, I can't talk to you; I can't seem to say what I want to; but, honest to goodness, I'll try to be a gentleman. I've never yet had to be ashamed of the way I treated a woman."

Sheila believed him. "You see, the real trouble is that if I were to go with you some one might think it odd."

"You mean they might think and say something wrong of you." There was aggression, as well as surprise in his tone.

"Yes, just that."

"And you'd like to go—if it wasn't for what might be said?"

"I'd like to go—very, very much. I'll be very truthful with you, Mr. Bronson, and say that your invitation is very tempting; and, what's more, I'm going to accept."

"Fine!" He stepped forward, his face alight with boyish enthusiasm.

"Yes—I'm going to let you call for me at seven o'clock. That'll give me half an hour to get home, and an hour to dress. If you'll have a taxi, I'll wear my party gown and my lovely silver slippers. See, I'm just as enthusiastic as can be, even if I have only known you a few hours."

Five minutes later she was giving Bronson the address, refusing to let him send her home in a taxi. While she had been putting on her hat she wondered why she had accepted the invitation; but Bronson was so much of a man, and Mr. Hamilton had truly introduced them, that, in spite of what she feared was her better judgment, she did not tell him that she had changed her mind.

It was exactly seven when the maid announced that Mr. Bronson was calling, and should she let him wait in the parlor down-stairs, or should she bring him up to Sheila's sitting-room.

"Bring him up, Nora—I'm going to let him see my green lamp-shade and the piece of rock that came off the Blarney stone."

Nora, Irish herself, was laughing as she showed Bronson the way, and thinking all the while that it was a fine boy who was calling on Miss McNeil.

"I'm all ready," Sheila greeted him from the doorway. "But I'm just vain enough to ask you to come and see my rooms. When I first came here to live I had a back room on the fourth floor, but each time Mr. Hamilton gave me a raise I got a little nearer the front door; and last year I got these two honest-to-goodness rooms one flight up, and I furnished them myself. It's such fun having your own sitting-room."

But Bronson was not looking at the room; his eyes were all for Sheila.

For three days he had seen her a trim little miss in tailor-made clothes, but she was no longer secretary to the sales-manager. She was a sprite whose garments were blue and silver, a silver cord in her hair, and silver shoes and stockings on her feet.

"Don't eat me," she laughed. "Say good evening, and if you look so hard at my dress I'll think there's a hole in it."

"I think that—that you're about the most wonderful girl I've ever met," Bronson said gravely.

"Hush, or I'll think you're Irish, and have kissed the Blarney stone. My uncle was there once; he brought me back a chip he picked up, and I kiss it 'most every day."

She left him for a moment to get her coat, and Bronson looked critically about the room. He was not used to a woman's room; women never had played a very great part in his life since he had been old enough to ride away from his father's cabin.

Now he looked about him at the silken draperies, at the wicker furniture, and at the few pictures that were on the walls.

"I don't see how you can hate this place," he said when Sheila was with him again. "I don't see how you could ever wish to leave it."

"It's pretty, but to me it stands for so many disappointments, so many days

when I wished I was dead. Sometimes when I count the cost, I'd like to pile it all up and burn it."

Bronson did not understand, and said so.

"It's a long, long story, Mr. Bronson. I'm afraid it wouldn't interest you at all. Let's go. I'm very, very hungry."

II.

It was after midnight when Bronson left her, and Sheila decided that the evening had been a decided success.

They had dined at a noisy restaurant where the cabaret was famous, had been to see her favorite musical comedy star, and then had supper at the quietest and most fashionable hotel in the city, this being Sheila's choice. Still the girl was not happy—for a spirit of discontent had filled her.

It was not that she longed for a chance to live in the pleasure-filled world that she had just seen; but she wished to run away from the life she knew, out to the broad existence that Bronson pictured.

Their conversation had been largely personal. With frank curiosity they had questioned each other as to their lives. Sheila had told about her parents, her life at the convent, and of going to work at seventeen.

Bronson's story was not altogether different. He had started on the lowest rung of the ladder and climbed up, hand over hand. Only the settings were different; the stories were about the same.

Sheila did not see it in that light, however; she was thinking of the little annoyances that had filled her life, and of the confinement. She tried to reason it out that any existence might become monotonous after a time; she even tried to think that every community might hold its Philipse.

Philipse! Sheila's face drew into a grim line when she thought of Philipse. She knew that he had been largely responsible for the luxury she now enjoyed, for as his secretary she received thirty-five dollars a week.

She tried to tell herself that Philipse was only a business employer—that everything else between them was over. Once she had believed that to be the case, but to-night how could she deny the fact she knew to be the truth.

With a sudden jump she sprang onto her bed and snapped out the light.

"Good night," she said aloud, a custom that had grown on her, and intended to hide her loneliness from herself. "Tomorrow's another day—and who can tell?"

Ten minutes later she was asleep, and not even her dreams told her that in his big hotel room Bronson was smoking his good-night cigar and wondering if Miss Sheila McNeil would be contented in a ranch house till he could build a place fitting for such a lady.

III.

THE more Bronson saw of John Philipse the less he liked him. And the more he spoke to Sheila about Philipse the more annoyed he became, for she would say nothing about the man.

Bronson, however, could see that Sheila was not happy at her work. He was trained to know a sensitive horse, or to guess the reason why cattle were restless. It was this knowledge that told him Sheila was unhappy.

To him she seemed a frightened animal, like his big bay horse that always shied at the Tompkins crossroads because of the bit of newspaper that had blown in her face the first time he drove her down that way.

It was Wednesday afternoon when Bronson and Sheila first met; and as Bronson explained it the following afternoon, he was going home on Saturday, and he didn't want to lose any time in talking. He had to work during the day, but his evenings were free.

"I know it's sort of rushing you, but then that's what I want to do," he confessed. "Please don't say that I can't see you to-night."

Sheila, after a minute's thought, told

him that he might call on her. Bronson would have preferred another theater and supper party, but Sheila was firm. He could call on her for an hour or so, and she would ask Miss Goode, the school-teacher who lived on the third floor, to come in and make a Welsh rabbit. She'd ask a few other people, and have a party.

"You see, if you don't go anywhere but to theater and cabarets you'll never know what we New Yorkers are like at home, so I'll just let you meet half a dozen real ones, the kind of people who only go to the theater once a month and then sit in the balcony."

Bronson was willing—anything as long as it meant he could be near Sheila—and he hurried through his solitary dinner, and then waited a lonesome hour till it was eight o'clock.

He was the first of Sheila's guests to arrive. If she had been a sprite the night before, she was Miss Simplicity this evening. Her dress was dark linen, with collar and cuffs of white, and her hair was twisted low on her neck, giving her the appearance of a country miss to whom the outside-world is a legend.

"Now you look like my people," Bronson said in greeting, not letting go of the hand she offered him. "Now you look as you would if you came from the ranch-house to meet me."

Sheila started and drew away her hand.

"I suppose I shouldn't have said that. I'm not what you might call really cultured, and I can't help being natural and saying what I think."

"And you think I belong in a ranch-house?"

"Yes, in mine; but I suppose you'll end up by living in a ten-story apartment with some fellow like—Philipse."

A flush crept over Sheila's face.

"Please don't talk about him. I want to be very happy to-night, and forget all about everything that isn't pleasant."

"Oh—so Philipse isn't a pleasant subject. Now look here, little lady, if you just say the word I'll break every bone

in that chap's body. I know he's a married man, and I know he used to be kind of sweet on you. What did he do—throw you over? Just say the word—and—"

"Mr. Bronson!" Sheila's head went very high. "Please remember that it isn't quite the thing for you to say that Philipse threw me over. It's—it's insulting."

Bronson was nonplused. "I didn't—didn't mean to be insulting," he faltered. "I hope you'll forgive me?"

"Yes, under the condition that you don't speak about Mr. Philipse again."

"I promise."

There was a moment of strained silence—Bronson picked up a book and turned the pages, and then Miss Goode came in and eased the tenseness of the atmosphere.

Even if he had promised not to speak about Philipse, Bronson did a great deal of thinking; and as if his questions were incidental, he asked Mr. Hamilton to tell him something of the man. Hamilton had little to say. He was a splendid salesman; married; his wife was supposed to be rich; and there the story stopped save for business details, which were many and all to Philipse's credit.

At noontime, finding Sheila alone, Bronson reminded her that he had only one more evening in town, and asked her if it couldn't be celebrated in what he termed "a bang-up manner."

Sheila hesitated before answering. Since the previous night she had rather feared to be alone with Bronson. Still, his very presence in the office was enjoyable. She had smiled many times at his eagerness to "break every bone in Philipse's body"—there was something about Bronson which made her feel that he would really do such a thing if she demanded.

Sheila did not know it—or, rather, would not admit it—but Bronson had come to mean much to her in the past two days. She was modern enough to scoff at love at first sight, and yet—

"I would like to go," she said simply. "Only let's see something big and gripping. I don't feel like silly, tinkly entertainment to-night."

They chose the play, and Bronson sent for tickets.

"Now you put on your pretty dress again, and we'll have a bang-up supper anywhere you say. This is going to be an evening to remember the rest of our lives."

At closing time, however, Sheila told Bronson that they would have to forego the dinner-party.

"Mr. Philipse wants a report got out to-night. I'll have it finished in an hour, and you can call for me in time for the theater. I'm sorry, but the report is mighty urgent."

"Can't it go over till morning?" he asked.

"Mr. Philipse wants it mailed to-night."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. He hasn't told me yet."

"Then I'm going to tell him to get some one else to do it?"

"No—please don't. Just you go right along, and call for me about half past seven—no, make it quarter past—and then we can have coffee at one of the hotels and pretend we had a wonderful dinner. There'll be time if you get there at quarter past."

"Quarter past," Bronson repeated sharply, and went back to Hamilton's room for his coat and hat.

The office was almost deserted now, the later-goers hurrying with their work. He debated a minute, and then went to the elevator. He walked slowly the length of the block, and then turned with brisker steps in the direction of Broadway.

At the subway entrance he paused again. What right had Philipse to want a report on this of all nights? This time to-morrow he—Bronson—would be speeding westward, and Philipse could have all the reports he wanted—unless—

Bronson had been used to having his way; that was why, his cattle were famous everywhere that cattle were bought and sold. Was he going to let Philipse thwart him now?

He stamped his heel against the cement pavement and headed with brisk steps to the office. He was going to take Sheila away with him, if he had to break every typewriting machine in the office. He was going to take Sheila away with him if—

The very thought that came to him that minute was overpowering. He laughed aloud, startling two or three people who were near him. He almost ran into the building, his steps reeling as if he were intoxicated.

He was going to take Sheila away with him. Not only to-night, but forever. What did he care for conventions! Nature demanded no chaperon and long engagements. He was nature's son—why should he care for man-made laws?

He reached the eighteenth floor and hurried down the long corridor. The office-doors were open, for a horde of cleaning women had come out of nowhere, and were busy making the rooms ready for the following day.

He skirted a pile of waste-paper and stepped over a pail of hot water. Most of the offices were dark, but a bright light shone through the glass partitions about Philipse's sanctum.

The door was partly closed, and as Bronson started to push it open he heard his name mentioned—and hesitated.

"I'm sorry you had to disappoint Bronson, but then I wanted to talk to you," Philipse was saying.

"Then there wasn't a report, after all." Sheila's voice was choked with anger.

"Yes, a report—one to be settled between ourselves. I've been asking you to go out with me for two weeks, and you wouldn't. Yet you let this lout of a plainsman tow you all about town. What's the game?"

Bronson shifted uneasily, wondering if

he had better stay concealed—or whether to break into the room and thrash Philipse within an inch of his life. He heard a quick movement—and Sheila's voice, verging on tears.

"Please be man enough to stand aside and let me go."

"Go, nothing; you're going to stay in the corner there till you promise me you'll take my terms. I've been mighty decent to you. I love you."

"You degenerate cad! You, a married man, to talk to me like that! I loved you once, and you married a woman who could give you polo ponies and a racing-car. I've stopped loving you forever."

"But I never loved my wife."

"Well, at least you ought to be decent to her. If you don't let me pass this minute—I'll tell Mr. Hamilton the whole story in the morning, and I'll tell your wife right afterward."

"And don't you suppose I could tell my story? Don't you suppose Hamilton is wise to why I went to him three times in six months and had your salary raised. You poor little fool, even this man Bronson knows. You say Hamilton introduced you—well, Bronson wanted a good time, and Hamilton knew the girl to send for."

"You know you lie!" The words were a low moan from Sheila's heart, and she reeled as if struck.

Philipse moved forward to meet her, but a hand on his shoulder sent him sprawling to the floor. Bronson's movements had been as the whirlwind, and it was his arms that closed about Sheila.

For a minute there was no sound. Philipse picked himself up from the floor, and his hands sought the back of a small chair. Sheila was sobbing noiselessly against Bronson's coat.

"Well?" Philipse asked after a minute. He was a good talker, and might brazen himself out of this situation.

"I don't give a damn if what you said a minute ago was true," Bronson said slowly. "I don't believe it. It wouldn't

make any difference if it was true, but it's about the last rough talk you'll ever pull to any woman."

Philipse's hands gripped tighter the back of the chair and swung it a few inches from the floor.

"Put it down!" Bronson roared without moving, and Philipse obeyed.

"Now, you white-livered snake, I'm going to tell you something, and then I'll probably thrash your soul to hell."

Sheila shuddered and lifted her head. Bronson's arm was still about her, and she made no effort to move from his embrace.

"This party makes me think of fifteen years ago, when I was a kid and just starting out to earn my way. There were a bunch of cattlemen in our neighborhood, and the wolves were bothering their calves, and getting an occasional two-year-old. It was bad business, and they offered me my first regular salary to kill all the pests.

"The Wolfer—that's the name they gave me in the neighborhood, and the Wolfer is what they call me to-day. And you know, Philipse, in the last half-hour I've come to think that a wolfer is what is needed right here in this city you folks are so proud of. They need them for fellows like you. Out in my country they look on a wolf as about the lowest thing God made; but if they'd ever heard you to-night, they'd take off their hats in respect every time they saw a wolf-track in the snow."

Bronson moved a quick step forward, his hands clenched. Philipse started, and his hands sought the chair-back. With a lightninglike move Bronson pulled the chair from his grasp.

"Don't kill—don't!" Sheila cried, and she tugged at the arm that Bronson was lifting to strike. "He isn't worth killing."

Bronson looked from the cowering, white-lipped Philipse to Sheila.

"I guess maybe you're right. It would mess things up—and we've got to get away to-morrow."

Philipse straightened perceptibly.

"Now you get; and if I ever see your face again it'll be just as if I'd caught a wolf in a trap—death," and with one threatening shove he sent Philipse, hatless and coatless, into the darkened corridor of the office.

"I don't know how I can thank you," Sheila whispered, after a minute. "Both for what you've done and what you said."

"About not caring whether what Philipse said was true?"

She nodded. "Once—I thought I loved him."

"Yes, I heard all that."

"And about the money?"

"Yes—and Mr. Hamilton's introduction. He lied about me as he lied about you. Now, can't we shake and forget about him?" He offered her his hand.

She took the big hand that seemed to hide her own in its palm.

"I'm glad you were a wolfer once," she told him, smiling through her tear-stained eyes. "And now I'm going to ask you to please let me off from to-night's party. I'm tired—and I'd like to be alone."

Bronson's face mirrored his disappointment.

"If you'd rather not go," he said slowly; and then: "But before you leave me I want to tell you something. It's about a calf I picked up once after I'd shot two wolves that were getting ready to enjoy a good meal. The calf had a tear in its foreleg, so I took it home with me—half-carried it most of the way—and the men the animal belonged to thought it was such a joke that they gave it to me for my own. It was the first head of cattle I ever owned—the very first, and old Mrs. Calf is still living out there at Sunrise, and I've got a painting of her in the ranch hallway.

"Now you know"—he stopped a minute—"when I came back here to-night, it was to tell you that I wanted you to stop having to do things for Philipse. To tell you, in good, all-round

United States, that I loved you, and wanted you to marry me to-morrow. And you know when I beat off that wolf, it made me think that—"

"That I was your pet calf." Sheila's tears were banished by her laughter.

Bronson was crestfallen. "I wasn't thinking to insult you any, only—I can't tell a story the way it ought to be."

"I shouldn't have laughed. That's the trouble with us that are Irish; we laugh most of the time, and sometimes at the wrong time."

"But I guess you were laughing at

something funny then; it must be funny to hear me tell you that I love you."

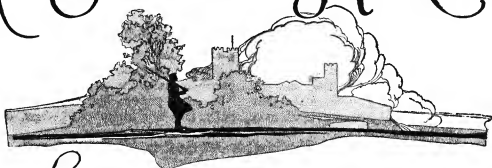
"Funny? Do you suppose old Mrs. Calf thought it was funny when you half dragged her home after killing the wolves? Don't you remember that song we heard the other night, 'When the right man comes along?'"

Sheila lifted her face to Bronson's, her eyes glowing with light.

"You mean?" he asked wonderingly.

"I mean, O Wolfer, that we'll go to dinner, and then I'll have to pack—if we're going away to-morrow night."

A Soldier's Honor



by Captain S. S. Harrington

Author of "Breaking Into West Point," "Rosalind and the Forty Thieves," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A MANUFACTURED BRIDEGROOM.

WEST POINT and Forty-Second Street!

An hour and a half by train; two separate worlds in ideals and traditions.

The motto of West Point is, "Honor, Valor, Country!" Forty-Second Street has many slogans, but none of them is just like that.

Neither is "Early to bed, and early to rise." At West Point, reveille has long since sounded, and the work of the day is on at full swing before Forty-Second

Street has awakened to much more show of life than the rumbling of the morning milk-carts.

As to being "Healthy, wealthy, and wise," well, maybe West Point scores on the first count; but when it comes to gathering in the mazuma, or proving up as wise guys, where have the soldier boys got even a look-in? To tell the truth, they rate in the eyes of Forty-Second Street as little better than a bunch of come-ons.

Take, for instance, the case of Cadet Kerr Mosely and Miss Queenie Sinclair.

This Kerr Mosely, mind you, too, was rated as "some pumpkins" in the corps.

He was halfback on the football team, close up to the top of the list in class standing, a soldier every inch of him, and the leader in every mischievous prank or bit of deviltry that was going—a stalwart, red-headed, young giant who could out-ride, outbox, outshoot, and outflirt any other man at the academy, the idol of his fellows and a terror to the "tacs."

And Queenie Sinclair was just a has-been of a chorus girl—some people said that she had been in the first production of "Erminie" at the Casino way back in eighteen hundred and froze-to-death, but that may have been slander—she looked like a cross between a colored comic supple-ment and the ruins of Blarney Castle.

But at that, she put it over this Mosely "Silas" seven ways from Sunday. That's Forty-Second Street for you; also the female of the species.

Not, of course, that the scheme was of Queenie's contriving. Like most dear old grandmothers of to-day, she was brilliant enough of hair and complexion—too brilliant to be true—but even Queenie's best friends could never have rated the glimmer of her mental attainments at more than half a kilowatt.

No; it was Tommy Wilburt who doped out the great idea, Tommy Wilburt, a former press-agent, but now one of those lilies of Broadway—tiger lilies—that toil not, neither do they spin, yet in some mysterious manner manage to exist.

His inventive genius, spurred by certain trenchant remarks on the part of his landlady, and the knowledge that his bank-roll had dwindled to one lone "fish" folded away in the corner of his waistcoat-pocket, had worked out the project during the watches of a more or less sleepless night; and, as he started out the next morning for breakfast he felt that all he needed was a suitable instrument.

Strange are the ways of destiny. If Mr. Wilburt had possessed even so much as a dollar and a quarter, he would probably have chanced eating at one of the sumptuous places on "Main Street"; but that single, lone bone drove him to econ-

omy, and to the Sixth Avenue bakery, where Queenie Sinclair was fortifying herself with rolls and coffee for her weary, daily round of the managers' offices.

Queenie was very much "at liberty," which is the polite, theatrical term for "out of a job." Even the burlesque shows and the tabloid musical comedies of vaudeville must draw the age limit somewhere, and as one outspoken producer had told her only the day before: "It's broilers we're using in this show, Queenie; not soup stock."

In short, she was in a desperate and bitter mood, ripe for almost any proposal from manslaughter down; and Mr. Wilburt, as his eye encountered her along the line of marble-topped tables and noted the defiant tilt to her hat, instinctively recognized the fact.

He sauntered over and seated himself across from her.

"Hello, kid." He affected a tone of glad surprise. "How 're they coming?"

Queenie drew herself up haughtily, prepared to resent the advances of a mere "beanery" patron; but Tommy's rather puffy face and protuberant, light eyes stirred a chord of memory.

"Why, if it ain't Mr. Wilburt!" She melted. "I ain't saw you since that summer opera snap what Mannheimer took out."

"Yes; and you got a raw deal that time, if any one ever did," Tommy protested eagerly. "I told Mannheimer he was making the mistake of his life when he canned you to put that Swede chambermaid in for leader of the march, and—"

"Canned?" Miss Sinclair interrupted shrilly. "Never think that no stiff the size of Mannheimer ever done nothing like that to me. I got a better offer to join out with the 'Girl from Dayton' company, and I quit him."

Mr. Wilburt realized his mistake, and hastened to retrieve himself.

"Just another lie of Mannheimer's, eh?" he nodded. "Well, don't you care, kid. A knock from him is always a boost,

and anyhow, it's all ancient history now. By the way, what are you doing these days, Queenie?"

"Me?" Her tone of careless ease was only too obviously a pretense. "Oh, I'm resting a week or two. The pictures is after me hard, but I can't just see it. They say them studio lights is something fierce on the eyes. Then there's a 'girl show' that I been offered a swell part in, and—"

But Wilburt was in no humor to listen to a long list of mythical prospective engagements.

"Say, look here, kid," he cut in; "I got a part that I believe you can play. It ain't strictly professional"—he glanced at her narrowly across the platter of ham and eggs which had just been set before him—"but there's a bunch of coin to be made, if it's handled right."

The significance of that look and of his tone was not lost upon her. She hesitated a moment; then she twitched her shoulders with a reckless movement and gave an unsteady laugh.

"A bunch of coin? That's what we're all after, ain't it? Go ahead and shoot, Mr. Man. What's your lay-out?"

For answer Tommy extracted a newspaper clipping from his pocket-book and handed it across to her. It was the story of a West Point cadet who had been expelled from the academy for marrying.

"That's what gave me the suggestion," explained Mr. Wilburt after he had read the story.

But Queenie only looked puzzled.

"I don't get your idea at all." She shook her head. "Where is there any money in getting the rollers put under a cadet? Are you wise to another stunt of the kind, and want me to tip it off? Is that it?"

"No, no." Wilburt shrugged impatiently. "On the contrary, I want to pull off a wedding, which shall be a dead secret. And you, Queenie, I have cast to be the bride."

She stared at him a moment; then, with the suspicion that he was merely hoaxing her, an angry red overswept the rouge

upon her cheeks, and her eyes took on a vicious glitter.

"Trying to kid me, are you?" Her voice trembled. "Why, you miserable rat," and she reached for her cup of coffee; "if I wasn't too much of a lady I'd dash this in your ugly, grinning mug, you—"

"Hold on!" Tommy protested hastily. "I'm not joshing you. This is on the level, Sinclair. I really do want you to hook up with one of these guys in a secret marriage. I tell you, there's money in the proposition."

"Money?" she scoffed. "Why, them cadets only have fifty cents a week spending money. I know, 'cause I boarded in a family once what had a boy at West Point. And marry one of them? No, thank you; I ain't looking for no children to raise just at present. Besides—"

She stopped abruptly as if checking herself in something she had been about to say.

"Besides," she went on, a trifle lamely, "what's that old saying about catching your rabbit before you cook him? Where am I going to get my cadet?"

He picked up the morning paper which lay beside his plate, and folding it over so as to disclose the head-lines dealing with the Army-Navy football game scheduled for that day, passed it across to her.

"Where will you get a cadet?" he repeated. "Why, the town will be full of them to-night, and as the chances are about six to one that the Army is going to win, they'll all probably be in high, good humor. If you do as I tell you, old girl, you can land any of 'em. But there's one in particular that I'm out after."

He considered a moment; then taking back his paper, made a check-mark with his pencil opposite one of the names in the line-up of the Army team.

"Kerr Mosely?" she questioned, as she read the name he had indicated.

Wilburt nodded.

"What you got against him?"

"Nothing," Tommy laughed; "except that he's the only son of old George K.

Mosely, United States Senator from California, and generally known as the 'Rockefeller of the Pacific coast!' Now, do you begin to get a line on the workings of the plot, little one?"

"You mean that if I marry this cutie the old man will pay to get rid of me?"

"Yes; to get rid of you and avoid all the scandal and publicity that would come from having his son fired. He'll come across for a million."

"And they can't do anything to me for it?" she demanded warily. "Arrest me for kidnaping, or anything like that?"

"Not a chance." Tommy brushed the suggestion aside with a wave of the hand. "This boy's of full age, twenty-three years old. He can tie himself up to—" Mr. Wilburt searched his imagination for something to stand as a totally impossible bride, but nothing occurring to him as worse than Miss Sinclair, he ended by simply saying, "you. He can tie himself up to you and nobody's got a right to question it. Besides, their one effort will be to keep the thing quiet."

Queenie stirred her coffee thoughtfully.

"Give me the sketch," she said. "How do we land him?"

"Easy as fish for Friday. Catch him on the old 'chivalry' gag—'protest a woman's honor,' and all that sort of thing. You make up for an ingénue part, understand, curls and ruffles and giggles of sweet sixteen. You can do it all right. I remember a bit you had with the Mannheim show that was just the type I want. Only for Heaven's sake, tone down that make-up of yours. This doll is supposed to be a shy, clinging homebody, not a belle of the manicure parlor."

"You leave that to me," Miss Sinclair interrupted impatiently. "Get down to the action. What happens?"

"Well, it's like this. You're at a dance place with your cousin—I can get some chorus man with a dress-suit to do that part of it for ten or fifteen dollars—and you're just as excited as can be over the novel experience of being out at such a place at night. Then I come along with

Mosely and stop to speak to 'Cousin.' He introduces us to you, and insists that we sit down at your table."

"Then you know this Mosely already?" broke in Queenie.

"Know him? No. But I'll make his acquaintance to-day, never fear, and I'll manage to steer him to that dance-joint, too. Don't you worry about my part of it. Just pay attention to what I tell you, and figure on what you've got to do yourself."

"Let's see; where was I at? Oh, yes. 'Cousin' introduces us, and we sit down at your table. Then, after a few minutes, Cousin excuses himself and fades, saying he'll be back shortly. You and Mosely have a dance or two. You play up to him, but not too strong, understand—just the sort of fluttering interest that a girl of sixteen would show toward brass buttons—and, for the love of Mike, say as little as possible. You're a regular Anna Held with those eyes of yours, Queenie; but, you know well enough, conversation ain't your long suit."

"And now the real work of the piece commences. Cousin doesn't come back. You begin to get worried and uneasy, ask what time it is, and when you find it is after midnight, look scared and wonder what papa will say."

"I volunteer to go hunt cousin up, and come back looking grave. I draw Mosely aside and whisper that cousin has got a bun on, and has gone off with a crowd of rah-rah boys."

"'The rotten souse,' I say, 'he's apt never to think of this little girl again. We've got to get a taxi and take her home.'"

"So, into a taxi the three of us pile, and speed it up to old Dilsey's house on Ninety-Fourth Street. Dilsey comes to the door himself, in dressing-gown and slippers, playing the heavy parent."

"'Who's there?' he snarls."

"'It's me; papa,' you say. 'These gentlemen brought me home.'"

"Then you try to slip by him, but he bars the way, and puts up a roar that

makes the father's curse in 'Hazel Kirke' sound like 'God bless you.'

"You plead with him, and we argue, but we might as well talk to a stone. Never shall you cross that threshold again, he declares, until you can do so with a marriage certificate in your hand. Then he goes inside and slams the door in your face.

"What are we to do? You're bawling and crying, telling us there's no place for you but the river, and so I put it squarely up to Mosely that the only honorable thing for him is to marry you.

"A divorce can easily be arranged later,' I tell him; 'but in order to protect this poor child's good name and save her from a suicide's grave, somebody must go through at least the form of a wedding with her. I'd do it myself,' I say, 'but unfortunately I already have a wife; so it looks as if you were elected.'

"And you expect him to fall for a game of bunk like that?" queried the chorus girl scornfully.

"My dear, it's been my business to peddle bunk around this town for many years, and I never yet fell down on anything I really wanted to put across. I've seen older and wiser men than this cadet fall for stuff that was fifty times rawer than this is. No, sister; the one gift I have is a persuasive tongue, and if you'll only play up to your end of it, I'm willing to guarantee that I can coax him in front of a justice of the peace over in Hoboken, and that you'll be Mrs. Kerr Mosely by this time to-morrow."

Again Queenie musingly stirred her coffee.

"How much real money can you hold the old man up for?" she questioned. "I don't want to hear about millions, but what he'll actually give up."

"Well, we ought to get fifty thousand dollars at the very least," averred Mr. Wilburt.

"And how are you planning to cut it?" she bargained.

"Four ways. Equal shares to me, and you, and Dilsey, and a fourth share to

the lawyer that we'll need to conduct the negotiations and collect the money for us."

Miss Sinclair drained the last of her coffee, and set down the empty cup with an air of decision.

"Twelve thousand five hundred for mine, eh?" she calculated. "All right, Tommy. Bring on your cadet."

CHAPTER II.

THE HONOR OF THE CORPS.

AS Tommy Wilburt had predicted, West Point won the Army-Navy football game that day; and consequently when the victorious team returned home the following afternoon, the reservation rang with shouts of exultation, and long after taps were sounded the barracks still continued to celebrate its triumph, the authorities for once winking at the breach of regulations.

But the one man whose name was on everybody's tongue, and who more than any other had helped accomplish Navy's defeat, took but little part in the general jubilation.

"Who's got the Navy's goat?" sang out a cheer leader as the hero of the occasion appeared in the quadrangle. And the admiring corps, crowding around in congratulation, chorused back:

"Mosely! Mosely!"

"Spell it out!" shrieked the cheerleader, and five hundred lusty throats chanted in a great volume of sound:

"K-E-R-R M-O-S-E-L-Y!"

They would have carried him on their shoulders in their exuberance; but he shrank back from the ovation, and instead of seeming gratified, acted as if he wanted to run away.

As soon as might be, indeed, he did make his escape, and slipping off to his quarters, where none could intrude save his faithful room-mate, Darwin, remained there in gloomy seclusion.

"Hanged if I know what's got into him!" Darwin reported to a group of in-

qu coasting comrades later in the evening. "You'd think to see him, that he'd chucked the game for the team, instead of winning it practically single-handed. He just stands there staring out of the window, with nothing more to say than a particularly reticent clam. If he wasn't so all-fired fit, I'd think he was starting in on a sickness.

"Why, just to show you how he's behaving," Darwin went on, "he got a telegram from his dad to-night. Just the one word, 'Congratulations,' it was; but the way he looked you'd have thought it was a death warrant. He went white when he read it, and I believed for a minute he was going to faint. Then he sort of caught himself together. 'Oh, it's the game, he means,' he muttered. Yet what else could he have supposed the old man was wiring him congratulations about?"

"Pshaw! It's probably only the effect of coming off training," suggested one of the others consolingly. "I've seen fellows go queer before because of that, and Kerr has been sticking to it pretty close, you know. Give him a day or two, and he'll come around all right."

But a day or two passed, and a month or two passed; and still Cadet Mosely maintained that glum and repellent attitude toward his world. From being perhaps the most frankly sociable and genial chap in the whole corps, he degenerated into a recluse and a "grouch."

"He acts to me like a sort of Eugene Aram," said one keen-witted chap in discussing the change; "one of those guys, you know, that's got a guilty secret on his mind. Half the time he goes mooning along without noticing anybody or anything, and then if you happen to speak to him suddenly or unexpectedly, he'll almost jump out of his skin."

There was the more opportunity to observe and speculate upon the former favorite's altered demeanor, because there was little else to occupy the attention of the cadets in their hours of leisure.

It was a bitterly cold winter that year, starting in just after the Army-Navy

game—in the West Point calendar everything dates from that—and lasting unbroken until now late in February the river still lay sheathed in ice, the snow was piled deep across the plain, the biting winds of the Highlands whooped and whistled around corners and through sallyports, and the Gothic buildings showed along the spouting and eaves grotesque gargoyles and projections which the architect never planned.

Visitors to the post were few, and the ordinary entertainments of the season in consequence languished. It was a dull, depressing period, during which both the cadets and the officers in charge of them chafed under the monotony of their routine.

Various reckless outbreaks and escapades on the part of the corps were a natural result of these conditions, and proportionately there was a steady increase to the ranks of the "Area Birds," those offenders against military discipline who for their sins are compelled during recreation hours to pace the quadrangular courtyard of barracks, chins up, guns a shoulder, and at a quick-step.

Ordinarily Kerr could hardly have escaped this drag-net, and with the others would have been trudging a five-hour stretch in the bleak quadrangle on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons; but this year he was too absorbed and indifferent to join in any of the lawlessness.

Not so, though, his room-mate. Darwin was mixed up in nearly everything going, and although for a time he managed to evade the vigilance of the tacs, was finally gathered in and given a sentence—a circumstance which, strange as it may seem, was materially to affect the ambitious plans of Mr. Tommy Wilburt and Miss Queenie Sinclair.

Widely separate worlds West Point and Forty-Second Street may be; but just as a stone cast into a lake will cause an ever-widening ripple that spreads until it reaches the farther shore, the little incident up the Hudson was not to be unfelt in the land of the bright lights.

So far the project of the two schemers for annexing a wad of the elder Mosely's wealth had been progressing as smoothly and expeditiously as even they could have desired.

The lawyer they had retained—an artist at blackmail within the forms of the statutes—had already opened negotiations with Kerr's father, and the latter having come to West Point and satisfied himself by a rather painful interview with his son that the marriage had actually occurred, was now bargaining with the plotters to have the union dissolved and the whole distasteful business definitely closed up.

"It's a plain hold-up," he growled to his attorney. "Kerr had never seen the woman before he was introduced to her at the dance-hall; he left her at the altar. They inveigled him into the ceremony solely through his foolish sense of chivalry. Yet what can we do? They know that publicity in the matter would ruin my boy's career. We must simply settle with the woman as cheaply as we can, and then get her off to Reno or some place where this farcical marriage knot can be quietly untied."

The lawyer was an adept at extricating the sons of his wealthy clients from the scraps into which they managed to get. This was not the first time he had dealt with chorus-girl brides by suggesting financial balm as a salve for their broken hearts.

But he had to confess that Miss Queenie Sinclair, coached as she was by Tommy Wilburt and the shady legal adviser, was just about the toughest proposition he had ever encountered.

It was Queenie's last chance to play the rôle of a trusting and deserted damsel, and recognizing the fact, she was determined to make the most of it.

The lawyer had finally to report to Senator Mosely that an even \$100,000 was the very lowest settlement that he could effect.

The Senator knitted his brows a moment; then he wrote out a check for the

amount, and pushed it across the table to the lawyer.

"Some price for chivalry, eh? But I can't afford to haggle any longer. Tell my daughter-in-law"—he made a wry face—"that the money is hers as soon as the courts have done their work."

But the best-laid plans of millionaires and also of blackmailers sometimes gang agley. Papa Mosely's rosy belief that he had disposed of the affair by signing that check, and likewise the dream of easy affluence in which the Sinclair-Wilburt combination was indulging were both due for a jolt.

It fell about in this wise. Kerr, hurrying back to his quarters one snowy afternoon, was halted by one of the disciplinary officers, a lieutenant named Crosby, who had been his cadet captain when Mosely was a plebe, and against whom the latter consequently cherished an undying hatred.

Crosby was exulting over the fact that he had finally succeeded in landing the luckless Darwin among the "Area Birds," and he could not resist the temptation to rub it in on Darwin's closest associate.

"Ah, Mr. Mosely," he said with a malicious grin. "I just saw your 'wife' over at headquarters having an interview with the colonel. I expect you'll be wanted next."

If ever there was a case of a guilty conscience proving a man's undoing, it was then. Kerr gave a start which almost split his tightly buttoned fatigue-blouse up the back, and turned as many colors as a chameleon on a piece of plaid.

"My wife!" he gasped in consternation. "Is that woman actually here at the post?"

The next moment he could have cheerfully bitten his tongue out, for he realized from Crosby's stare of utter amazement that the other in speaking of his "wife" had only been using the West Point slang term for room-mate.

It was too late now, though, to recall or amend the fatal admission. The astonishment in Crosby's fishy eyes had al-

ready changed to a gleam of malevolent satisfaction.

"So?" The lieutenant significantly drew his note-book from his pocket and penciled an entry. "I wasn't far wrong, was I, when I said the colonel would likely be wanting to see you, too. In fact, I guess you would better come right along with me and have your talk with him now."

There was no help for it. Over to headquarters Kerr was marched, and ushered into the presence of that grim autocrat, the superintendent.

From his notes Lieutenant Crosby read a verbatim transcript of the conversation which had just occurred between Mosely and himself, laying especial stress upon the cadet's confused and stammering response to the statement regarding Darwin.

As he caught the implication contained in Kerr's unfortunate slip of the tongue, the colonel drew himself up sharply. Then he leaned forward across his desk, his face set and severe.

"Cadet Mosely," and his stern eyes pierced the culprit through, "do you realize that this remark of yours must be interpreted as a confession—a confession which, unless explained, will necessitate the lodging of charges against you, your court martial, and your almost certain expulsion from the academy?"

"I do, sir."

"Have you any explanation, then, which you wish to offer?"

Kerr gulped once or twice; he found it hard to speak.

"None, sir," he finally managed to answer.

The colonel's frown deepened; his voice took on an added tinge of hardness.

"Cadet Mosely, I ask you the direct question. Are you a married man?"

The legal procedure at West Point has a crude primitiveness which would turn the ordinary hair-splitting barrister of the courts green with wonder. No objections are permitted there on the score of incriminating one's self. They ask a

straight-out question, and they expect a straight-out answer.

Moreover, they get it. They have an institution called "The Honor of the Corps"—perhaps the most cherished tradition of the place—which prescribes that every cadet must reply truthfully when interrogated concerning his personal actions or behavior, no matter how disastrous the results may be to himself.

Queenie Sinclair and Tommy Wilburt had never heard of "The Honor of the Corps"; and even if they had they would never have believed it. From the viewpoint of Forty-Second Street they would have said: "There ain't no such animal!"

But Kerr was only too well aware of its existence, and he never once thought of disobeying or evading that unwritten obligation.

There was but one recourse left to him, a slight one; but he decided to take advantage of it, chiefly because the lump which kept rising in his throat at the thought of all this was going to mean to him made speaking increasingly difficult.

"If you please, sir," he said, "I should like to reply to that in writing."

"As you wish." The colonel nodded his assent. But as he turned back to his papers, Kerr, from his manner, was miserably conscious that the superintendent already regarded him as an outcast and pariah.

CHAPTER III.

ROYALTY TO THE RESCUE.

DARWIN, returning cold and weary after his five hours' stretch of duty in the Area, entered the quarters jointly occupied by himself and Mosely to find Kerr seated before the writing-table in a brown study.

So absorbed was he in his somber reflections that he did not even glance up; but Darwin had by this time grown accustomed to these fits of reverie on the part of his formerly lively comrade, and paid no heed.

"B-r-r-r!" he shivered as he hung over the radiator, tenderly massaging his red and frostbitten nose. "Talk about the hardships of Scott and Peary getting to the pole. They didn't have anything on me. I'll bet I've got icicles on my lungs."

He stood there, scowling out of the window across the snow-heaped plain.

"By George, I'm done!" he went on. "Anybody that wants to flatten his feet and freeze his spine in that confounded quadrangle can do it. As for me—quoth the raven, 'Nevermore!'"

Mosely roused from his abstraction, and stood up. There was a trace of bitterness in his faint, quizzical smile.

"You think you're playing in pretty tough luck, don't you? Why, 'Monk,'"—it goes without saying that this was the nickname in which Darwin rejoiced—"I'd give anything on earth just to be in your shoes. This," and he picked up a sealed envelope from the table, "is my walking papers."

The other stared at him incredulously. Not until he had stepped quickly over to the table, and seen for himself the superintendent's name on the envelope, did he begin to believe.

"Your resignation?" he gasped.

"Well, practically that. It's a statement to the 'supe' which is bound to break me."

"Why make it then?" expostulated Darwin.

"He asked me the direct question. I told him I would give my answer in writing. This is it."

"Oh!" Darwin gloomily nodded his comprehension. He, too, was familiar with the obligation imposed by "The Honor of the Corps." Then a suggestion came to him.

"But, look here, Kerr; they'll never put the skids under *you*. Why, man alive, it wouldn't be common gratitude after your showing in the Navy game. Every officer in the service, from the chief of staff down, would let out a roar. You might as well talk about firing the Victory monument."

But Mosely disconsolately shook his head. "Football isn't going to save me here, Monk. No; nor anything else. I'm married."

A bombshell could hardly have created greater surprise and consternation. Darwin slumped weakly into a chair, round-eyed, his mouth opening and shutting like a fish's without uttering a sound.

"So that's what's been the matter with you?" he managed finally to articulate. "Oh, Kerr, Kerr, why couldn't you have waited just a few months until commencement, and then it wouldn't have made any difference."

"Wait? You don't imagine I did this thing deliberately, do you? I was framed, don't you understand? They caught me with my guard down, and rushed me to the ropes before I realized what was happening."

"Oh, I know it's hard to believe," as Darwin cocked a skeptical eye at him. "But it's true, nevertheless; and what's more, you or any other file would have fallen for their game just as hard as I did."

Then he went ahead to tell how, in the flush of his day of triumph he had been entrapped by the sophisticated wiles of Miss Sinclair and Mr. Wilburt.

"All they wanted was money," he explained; "and the ink was hardly dry on the marriage certificate before they had a crook lawyer writing to my father to demand a settlement. He came right up here to see about it. As you may imagine, it wasn't a very joyful occasion. But the old boy agreed to see me through on it."

"And then," he groaned and sunk his head between his hands, "just when everything was arranged, when the terms had been settled, and the marriage was to be annulled, and I began to see myself clear of the whole rotten mess—just then this sneaking quill of a Crosby had to come along gloating over me on your account, and I stubbed my toe."

"There's nothing to be done now," he finished. "The supe has put it up to me

in so many words, 'Are you married?' and although I've written him the circumstances just as I've told them to you, I can't get away from the fact. I can't get away from it, and neither can he. They're bound to expel me; they can't even give me the opportunity to resign. The only drop of satisfaction I can get now is, that the bunch of flim-flammers will get left at the same time. I am telegraphing the old man to call off the deal he made with them."

He tried to speak nonchalantly, but in spite of himself his voice choked, and he turned quickly away to hide the quivering of his lips.

Darwin, who had been listening almost in stupefaction, suddenly straightened up.

"Hold on there!" he cried, eagerly stretching out his hand. "Maybe there's a way out of the muddle after all. I've got an idea. No; listen to me," as Kerr gave an impatient hunch to his shoulders. "This is something that looks as if it might work."

"Now tell me first," he went on, "did you take a slant at that notice on the bulletin board this afternoon?"

"You mean the one about calling off all the classwork for to-morrow on account of distinguished visitors? Prince Chu Yang of China and party coming up to give us the once-over? Is that the one you mean?"

"That's the baby," Darwin nodded. "Prince Chu Yang of China. He's what I had in mind when I told you I was done with this infernal area-tramping. If we can only dope out the proper formation with him, Kerr, all our troubles would be over—that is, mine would for certain, and I am almost sure yours would, too."

"They would, eh?" Kerr exhibited scant enthusiasm. "Well, maybe so; but you've got to show me. All I ever knew to come from visitors of that sort was about a dozen extra drills. Look how they trotted us around the parade ground for that greasy Central American president last month, and when the Duke D'Orville was here—"

"I'm not talking about any rat-trap presidents, or four-flushing dukes or counts," interrupted Monk. "What you have to have for this play of mine is genuine royal blood, a prince or a king. When one of that sort puts up a request to the supe, no matter what it is, he's got to grant it—as a compliment to the nation the guy represents; don't you understand? At any rate, that's what was pulled off when Prince Louis of Battenberg was here about ten or twelve years ago. The gang got next to him somehow, and Louis, being a good scout in his way, up and asks that all punishments be remitted."

"And the supe stood for it?"

"Without a whimper. He had to, don't you see, or maybe provoke what they call an international incident. Or, at least, that's the way Joe Phelps put it to me, and he got the story from his cousin, who was here at the time."

Mosely began to show a more lively interest. "And now you've got it in your head to tear off the same stunt, eh?"

"Sure; provided, of course, that this Prince Chew-of-tobacco, or whatever he calls himself, is really royalty. Nothing short of actual, blown-in-the-bottle royal blood will serve, you hive me; and I've been bothered more or less to know whether a Chink would turn the trick. 'Prince' sounds all right, of course, but you can't always tell about these ring-tailed titles. In Russia, as I understand it, prince doesn't mean much more than justice of the peace."

"Oh, I guess that part of it is all right." Kerr thoughtfully wrinkled his nose. "China is a republic now, I believe, or was up to day before yesterday; but there was some sort of an arrangement made, I remember, for the members of the royal family to keep their rank, and this guy must be one of them. 'H. R. H. Prince Chu Yang of China,' is the way they've got him billed on the bulletin board. Come to think of it, too," he exclaimed, "I heard Cap. Blendon tell Sleeper that he was a cousin to the late Emperor of China."

"By George, Monk!" He flung up his head with a sudden flash of excitement. "If this thing's as you say it is, we may be able to save my bacon."

"Hold on a minute," cautioned Darwin. "Don't start to celebrating too soon. We've got to catch our rabbit, you know, before we can cook it, and I'm wondering just a bit how we're going to manage his royal highness, and make him understand what we're after. Ten to one none of the party can speak a word of English."

"Ah! That's where your Uncle Cyrus plays trumps," Kerr cried exuberantly. "You never heard me spout Chinese, did you, Monk? Well, I can—good enough anyhow to make myself understood. I picked it up from old Hop Lee, our cook out at Santa Barbara."

"But even so," Darwin still shook his head, "how will you get to the prince to tell him what we want?"

"How?" Kerr shot him a glance of withering disdain. "How? Why, bawl it at him from the ranks, if I have to, you bonehead. Never fear but what I'll get to him somehow. A chance like this comes too pat to let it slip through my fingers."

So all that evening the two schemed and plotted to the utter neglect of their duties, and when at last the bugle sounded, "Lights out," Kerr retired, firm in the belief that the problem had been solved, and feeling as if the load of care he had been carrying for so many months at last had fallen from his shoulders.

Did any uneasy forebodings trouble his pillow that night, warning him of the consequences of his proposed action—consequences that were to lead him half-way around the world, and test his fiber in the fire of great experiences?

Truth to tell, no. The routine of a day at West Point, with its rigorous grind, is hardly conducive to visions either prophetic or otherwise.

A slumbering young giant, Mosely lay there on his narrow army cot, deep-breathing, oblivious to both his past and

his future, while destiny perched on his footboard and waited for the day.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE'S MANY A SLIP.

WEST POINT prides itself on always being prepared. Less than twenty-four hours' notice had been given of the impending royal visit; yet at noon when the party arrived, arrangements had been completed covering every detail for the proper reception of the prince, his daughter, the Princess Chu Sing, who accompanied him, and the various members of their retinue.

Kerr Mosely, painfully "bugling"—a cadet slang for "stalling"—at a recitation in mathematics, felt his heart leap with a thrill of excitement when he heard the rap of the professor calling a halt for the dismissal of the "section," and the subsequent announcement that all members of the corps, donning full dress, were to hold themselves ready for immediate assembly.

In spite of the notice on the bulletin-board, Kerr had been haunted with anxious fears lest something might happen to interfere with the coming of the party; but now, with the assurance that the prince had actually arrived, he shot a glance of purposeful significance at Darwin, and his heart beat high with a spirit of adventure.

Colonel Vance, the superintendent, rigged out in all the regalia of his position—chapeau, gold-fringed epaulets, and clanking sword—and surrounded by his equally glittering staff, met the distinguished visitors at the station and extended them a ceremonious welcome.

Then, as the cannon roared out a royal salute, they were escorted up the hill, where the corps was drawn up, a long, gray line in front of barracks "presenting" faultlessly, as the cavalcade whirled by.

Standing at rigid attention, Kerr scanned the impassive Oriental faces of

the prince and his suite as they stared phlegmatically about at the gray, battlemented buildings and the sparkling sweep of snow-covered plain. Out of the corner of his mouth he whispered to Darwin, who stood next him:

"Don't seem to be much difference in looks, does there, between a royal Chink and one of the ordinary washee-washee variety?" he commented.

"There isn't," Darwin responded with assurance. "All Chinks run in one of two patterns, either fat and greasy, or skinny and dried up. Don't you remember piping off the members of the Chinese embassy when we were down at the inauguration at Washington? No; you don't need to be afraid of bracing this prince, I tell you. Just make yourself think you're talking to some old laundry-man."

There was no chance to say more at the moment; for with the conclusion of the salute the battalion was relieved until the time set for an exhibition drill later in the afternoon, all except the members of the Third Division, who were ordered to shape their rooms immediately for special inspection by the visitors. Kerr and Darwin, being among those so designated, hurried off to busy themselves with broom and dustpan in tidying up.

They had expected this, and never had they gone at the distasteful chamber-maid work of their joint establishment with such zest and anticipation; for upon the forthcoming inspection they were basing all their hopes.

That had seemed to them the propitious moment for preferring their request to the prince, and they had rehearsed again and again the scene they expected to be enacted.

Knowing the custom of visitors on such occasions, they never doubted but that the prince would make some comment or ask a question regarding the arrangements of the room. He might address the cadets directly, although they believed it more probable that he would speak through an interpreter.

In either case, this was to be Kerr's opportunity. He would give the answer in Chinese, and the prince, surprised and interested at hearing his own language spoken, would hardly fail to pursue the conversation, and thus afford an opening for broaching the all-important subject.

Indeed, it seemed to the two cadets that no possible bar could now arise to the complete success of their project. Every circumstance was in their favor. The Chinese, from the time of Li Hung Chang down, have been given to asking questions at every opportunity, and so infrequently must it be that the prince heard himself spoken to in his own tongue that Kerr's use of it would almost certainly stir him to feelings of good-will.

And now the footsteps of the party could be heard upon the stairs. Hastily the two assumed an attitude of rigid "attention" as they awaited the expected knock upon the door.

Kerr's breath went a little faster, and he involuntarily braced himself for the ordeal. The footsteps were at the very threshold now. But—there was no knock on the door. Without pausing the party passed on down the corridor.

Blankly the cadets stared at each other. For some reason or caprice—they could not tell why, possibly from the sheer malice of fate—the superintendent had chosen not to show their quarters.

"Maybe they'll stop in on their way back?" ventured Monk, hopefully, although his lips were pale.

But Kerr only shook his head. He sank down miserably in a chair and buried his head in his arms. Their chance was gone, and he knew it.

His was not a nature, though, to cry long over spilt milk or to languish in defeat. Indeed, when he dropped his head into his arms, it was less in token of surrender than to review the situation and to ponder what steps next to take.

And now he straightened up suddenly, his jaw set, a glint of determination in his eye.

"By Jove, I'm not going to 'fess out'

like this, without getting even a look-in," he declared hotly. "Where there's a will, there's always a way. Monk, what are the orders for the day?"

"Exhibition drill this afternoon. There go the bugles for it now. Then, to-night, there's a reception at the supe's house."

"Ah?" Kerr exclaimed. "A reception, eh?"

"Yes; but that's for officers only. No chance to horn in there. I don't know, old man, but what our only hope is to shout out an S. O. S. at the prince from the ranks as you first suggested."

"No," Mosely shook his head, as he struggled into the sleeves of his overcoat. "America first, my boy. We mustn't let these foreigners get the impression that there is any ragged discipline here. Besides, it would only prejudice old Choo-choo-cars against us. These Orientals are great sticklers for etiquette and ceremony, you know. No," he repeated; "I've got a better scheme than that. Invitation or no invitation, I am going to that reception."

Accordingly, there was no disturbance or undignified interruption in the exhibition drill to which they now betook themselves.

With the rest of the battalion, Kerr and Darwin sloshed around through the snow of the parade ground in a series of evolutions which caused the somber eyes of the Chinese prince to lighten with a gleam of wonder as he admiringly clapped his gloved palms.

The shy, fawnlike, little Princess Chu Sing, wrapped in her furs, also applauded daintily. With Asiatic reserve, she showed nothing that was in her mind, but down in her heart she thought she had never seen a more inspiring sight than these sturdy young sons of Mars. And when they passed in review, company front, with lines as straight as ruled edges, her brown cheeks glowed with an irrepressible touch of color and the breath came fast between her parted lips.

After the drill was over, and along toward dusk, a gentle south wind sprang up,

bringing with it a distinct moderation in temperature. At about the same time lights began to glow out from the windows of the superintendent's residence, and busy preparations were in progress for the evening's entertainment.

How the ensuing complication occurred no one afterward was able to determine. It is a grave misdemeanor to tamper with the guard roster of an army post, and certainly not one ordinarily apt to be attempted for the purpose of "hogging" extra duty. Yet, strangely enough, when the commandant that evening instructed the first sergeant of "B" company to detail a cadet as a special sentinel for the superintendent's quarters during the hours of the reception, the name found decorating the top of the roster was that of Cadet Mosely.

It was quite out of order, Kerr belonging properly almost at the foot of the list; but the first sergeant was a rather dense youth, a slave to routine—perhaps that fact had also been reckoned on—and when he saw the name there, that settled it.

The assignment assured, Kerr prepared for it with the best his division could furnish. A pair of new trousers was requisitioned from a "plebe" whose waist measure and length of limb approximated Mosely's own; Darwin contributed a dress-coat with a prayer that the seams might hold; some one else gave a shako; and the various remaining articles of apparel were borrowed from other rooms along the corridor, either with or without the consent of the owners. If one is possibly to hobnob with royalty, one wants to put one's best foot forward, even though it is in another fellow's shoes.

So, thus accoutered, and with the cape of his gray overcoat thrown jauntily back to show his emancipated status as an upper classman, Kerr emerged from barracks and strode across the quadrangle. Nine o'clock found him at the superintendent's door, and a regular answered his ring.

"Inform Colonel Vance that Cadet Mosely reports as ordered." With mili-

tary punctilio, he brought his gun sharply to an "order."

The soldier vanished, and in a few minutes the colonel, resplendent in gold lace, appeared. But the dazzle of the colonel's raiment was not reflected in his countenance. He seemed perplexed, annoyed, perturbed.

Kerr, however, paid no heed. Erect as Darwin's straining dress-coat and the "corset" of a West Pointer—trunk-muscles trained to the quality of whalebone and tempered steel—could make him, he rifle-saluted.

"Cadet Mosely reports, sir, as ordered."

"Mr. Mosely, did you say?" peering at him from under bushy, gray eyebrows. Even yet the superintendent appeared incredulous.

"Yes, sir," briskly.

"Humph! I had hardly expected to see you."

The superintendent bit his lip in indecision. It was most irregular that a cadet who was practically under charges should be acting as a sentinel. Yet to go through the red tape necessary to secure a substitute at this late hour would be impracticable, and anyhow he had a dozen other things to look after.

As he debated the question, he raised another issue.

"May I remind you, Cadet Mosely, that the communication you promised in answer to my question of yesterday is not yet in hand?"

Kerr had rather expected this, and was prepared. Reaching inside his blouse, he drew out the letter he had written the day before and handed it over.

The colonel started to tear open the envelope, then paused and held it thoughtfully in his hands.

"Mr. Mosely, if this should contain what I fear it does, I should be forced to order you under arrest, and that would necessitate my securing another sentinel. Consequently, I shall leave it unread until to-morrow."

He turned and laid the letter away in

the drawer of a desk which stood there in the hall.

Kerr could hardly repress a gasp of relief. That had been the one weak spot in his scheme, the moment he had feared; and now he had surmounted it successfully. The rest would be easy sailing.

"You will continue your detail, therefore," proceeded the colonel curtly. "Take your post on that short walk." He pointed to a gravel path which ran along the side of the house.

At the order, Kerr's burgeoning elation evaporated like a cloud of steam struck by a sudden current of frosty air.

It had been his idea that he would be stationed at the front door, where, even though he failed to encounter the prince himself, he was almost certain to gain speech with some member of the suite either going in or coming out. But off at the side, where there was no chance of meeting any one but a kitchen-maid or one of the caterer's men, he might as well be in his own room at barracks.

"You will remain on duty," went on the colonel pitilessly, "until after the reception is over, and under no circumstances are you to allow any one except my own domestics to pass you. Those are your orders. Do you comprehend them?"

"I do, sir."

Mosely dejectedly saluted. He was too overwhelmed to hear a slight rustling on the stairs overhead, or to notice two shadowy feminine figures watching the interview from the landing.

"Then take your post," directed the colonel.

And with another faltering salute, Kerr obeyed.

CHAPTER V.

WHO GOES THERE?

DREARILY Cadet Mosely began to pace his gravel walk between its two banks of melting snow.

Gradually, however, he became interested in spite of himself, in the brilliant com-

pany gathered within the house, and plainly visible to him through the parted curtains at the windows. The prince did not especially impress him, being of that pattern of Chinaman which Darwin had described as "skinny and dried up," and like the gentlemen of his suite, attired in American evening dress, with only a broad, yellow ribbon to indicate his rank.

The princess and her ladies in attendance, on the contrary, were in native costume, and proved far more satisfying to the critical eye of the observer on the walk. Indeed, Mosely always a susceptible youth, might readily have lost his heart to the delicate little, ivory-tinted lady who looked as if she might have stepped out of a fan, had it not been for the surpassing charms of one of her fair associates.

This girl showed scarcely a trace of the Mongolian characteristics. Her brows were arched, not slanting, her complexion as exquisite as the flush upon a briar-rose; her profile chiseled like a Hebe's. Her eyes were dark, and met those of any one who spoke to her openly and frankly, not with the shrinking deference of the Oriental woman.

In short, she was a girl of to-day, lovely, laughing, wholesome, unaffected. She wore a short jacket of brocaded, ivory silk, fastened with buttons of carved jade and caught by curiously set pearl pins, and a skirt of heavy satin of the same shade reaching hardly to the ankle, displaying underneath the gold-fringed pantaloon and tiny, embroidered slippers. Her hair, worn low over her ears and under a net of gems—only served to accentuate, with its hint of an unchanging fashion, the difference between her and her companions.

"Some 'femme,' that," muttered Kerr, slowing up in his stride to gaze upon the entrancing vision. "I guess it would go bad to have her up here in the summertime, and take her for a stroll around 'flirtation'—not."

He halted suddenly, a jealous frown

creasing his features as he saw her talking and smiling up into the face of the despised Crosby.

"What can she see in that rotten quill?" he snarled disgustedly, as the two sauntered away together out of sight, and he resumed his solitary pacing.

Eleven o'clock came, and, with the band striking up "The Star Spangled Banner," the company inside formed for a gala entry into the ballroom, the colonel and his royal guest leading the van.

Outside, the lonely sentry fairly dragged his feet, striving not to keep step to the music, and choking down the lump which the familiar refrain brought to his throat; for rail as he would at the miseries of cadet life, there was bitterness in his heart at the thought of leaving the gray old academy with its many fond associations, and he was more than loath to give up the military career to which he had dedicated himself almost since the time he had laid aside pinafores.

Yet it was useless to repine. He knew that he was marked for expulsion as inevitably as that to-morrow's sun would rise. And what would his stern, old father have to say to this final outcome? Ah, that was a question on which the culprit did not dare to reflect.

With head down, engrossed in his moody meditations, he lagged up and down the stretch of gravel walk, oblivious to everything save his own troubles, until suddenly the sound of a soft footstep, and the sight of two figures looming up dimly, almost directly in front of him brought him to a recollection of his duties.

"Halt!" he challenged, throwing his gun viciously to a "port."

"Who goes there?"

And then he almost fell over backward; for, as the moon sailed from under a cloud, he saw, laughing out at him from a muffle of wraps the face of the Antipodean divinity at whom he had gazed through the window, while close behind her, equally shrouded, was the figure of the little princess—dainty, shy and lovely.

(To Be Continued.)



A Small-Town Tragedy

I.

"**S**AY, what do you want with all these shirts, Walt?"

Harry Anderson, owner of the little store on High Street, wrapped three silk shirts in a blue paper and handed them across the counter to his old school friend and pal, Walter Leeds, who worked at Canning Brothers, the seed store, farther down the street.

"Not possible you didn't know Mildred Race is coming back to-day, is it?"

Mr. Leeds tucked his package under his arm and added: "And anybody workin' in a big store like Wells & Wells in New York will be some swell dresser, take it from me. She'll be used to fellows who'll know what to wear and when. She shook me to go to the city and now I'm aimin' to let her know I'm not so slow if I did stay in Wedgely."

Anderson grinned and swung himself jauntily to a seat on the counter.

"Ah-ha, that explains the white flannels, the barrels of ties, the oodles of

shirts, the marvelous assortment of socks!" he exclaimed. "Come to think of it though, Ed Brown did say Mil was some baby-doll."

"Sure she is, but she won't out-doll me. And when she compares her home-town sweetheart with those city guys that trot her to cabarets every night, I don't intend to retire behind the tall grass on the farm! Some line of stock you carry, old top."

"Yep—all the latest. It's payin' pretty well, too. Decent of Mil to spend her vacation here with the old folks, ain't it?" added Anderson as he followed his friend to the door.

"Oh, Mil's all right. Well—so long!"
"So long."

II.

THE express from New York paused beside Wedgely station, where several hacks were drawn up at the platform.

One rather smart-looking car and a run-about driven by a girl in a middie completed the scene which greeted the slim little maiden who sprang from the second

car almost into the arms of Mr. Walter Leeds, who was wonderfully got up in the very best that "H. Anderson—Gentlemen's Furnishings" could produce.

His ruddy face glowed above a pale-pink silk shirt which was adorned by a string tie of a deeper pink, whereon reposed, as though but a transient guest, a large golden fly with ruby eyes. The rest of Mr. Leeds was encased in white duck trousers, black silk stockings and white canvas shoes.

But—he thought proudly—he had nothing on Mildred!

Mildred Race was small and thin, with the flatness of a board, and she wore a green silk sport suit, high white shoes and a Panama hat with a green band. Her blond hair came down on each pink cheek in a flat ring, and in some mysterious fashion, remained there.

Long pearl ear-rings dangled from the ears that were hidden somewhere behind the misplaced hair, and a pair of limp doeskin gloves hung in one little hand.

Mildred Race was the living definition of "chicken," "queen," "baby-doll" and "some kid." She almost bowled Walter Leeds over.

"Gracious, Walt, you're lookin' grand!" she told him with a languishing glance from under the dark lashes. "Get 'em to take my trunk up, will you? There's a love. Here's the check."

When they were seated in the hack Walter procured she appeared eager for news of the old crowd, and apparently oblivious of her escort's presence, produced a vanity case as he talked and powdered her nose, moistening one finger and passing it over brows and lashes.

"Don't look so fussed, Walt," she giggled when she caught his stare of amazement. "Everybody in town does it these days. You see, we're all so busy and so rushed we don't get time of finish at home. Too bad you never got to see me, Walt—it's some little old town!"

"It must be!" said Walter Leeds with a long breath.

"I wish Lelia could have come with me.

She shares my room at the boardin'-house," sighed Mildred. "Gee, you ought to see *her*, Walt! She's class, you bet. Different fellow every night in the week, and clothes! My—that girl is clever. She makes all her own clothes and some of mine. She made this!"

"She did!" Words failed him. "Are they wearing many—er—things as gay as that?"

"Gay!" with fine scorn. "For the love of Pete! Gay! This is deep mourning besides some of them. But the really swell ones cost too much money a yard, I couldn't go the price. But wait until you see my summer furs! I bet every girl in Wedgely would faint if she knew the glad rags I've got in that little old trunk. Say, Walt, do they have those dancing contests out at the White City yet on Friday nights?"

"Yes—want to go to-night? The bunch is going and we sort of hoped you'd want to."

"Sure—I've been dancin' every night in New York. Is that Steve Farrel over there, Walt?"

"Yes."

A tall, clean-cut young fellow in working clothes passed them with a nod and a wave of his hand, and Mildred Race looked after him with wide eyes.

"Don't he look awful in that get-up! Is he still at the works, Walt?"

"Yes, says he won't quit until he knows it all, from the bottom up."

"Looks as if he's liable to, then," she giggled. "He's awful good lookin' though."

"Yes, but our bunch has sort of let Steve alone since he began that sort of thing," and Mr. Leeds flicked a bit of dust from his pink silk sleeve with a polished finger-nail.

Mildred Race stared across the pretty street a long silent moment, her fingers absent-mindedly crumpling the doeskins.

III.

"CAN'T pay you for these now, old top, but let 'em go on the bill, won't

you? I've got to dress up to Mil. Gosh, you oughta see the glad rags she's got in her trunk."

Walter Leeds leaned confidentially over the counter of H. Anderson's haberdashery store and wiped his perspiring brow with a fifty-cent handkerchief sporting an elegant pale-green border and a huge green L in one corner.

"I saw her last night talkin' to Steve Farrel out at her gate," grinned Anderson, folding up one sky-blue tie and one salmon one. "She was some little looker then, believe me. Had on a kind of white and red thing pretty near as short as a bathing suit. I noticed it more because Steve had on that old suit he wears to the works, all over paint."

"Yep, she's a looker." Mr. Leeds stared absent-mindedly at a box of purple-bordered handkerchiefs marked six for thirty-five cents. "But she's got no time for Steve, not the way he looks. Funny he don't seem to care, good-lookin' boy like him, too. But a paint joint's no place to be a gentleman in, Harry. He ought 'ave gone into the seed business; maybe it don't pay so much, but, gosh—it's refined!"

Miss Mildred Race came out to the porch that evening when Mr. Leeds called, in a pink sport suit, made extremely short and extremely full, and while the neck was cut very low in a V, the sleeves came almost over the little hands. Her blond hair, brought down over her ears, lay flat to her small head and was built out in a thick knot midway between her neck and the top of her head.

She sat down on the step beside her caller and for once made no remark about his new flannels or his shirt, which always challenged attention, whether of the admiring variety or otherwise.

Her manner was graver than usual and her eyes rather wide and wistful.

"Gee, I'll miss you, Mil, when you go back Monday," Mr. Leeds sighed presently and lifted one freshly blanched shoe to the step beside her, meanwhile resting his elbow on his knee, and his chin in his

palm as he had seen Francis Bushman posed dozens of times. "This town's slow enough anyhow without a fellow's havin' a special reason for thinkin' it is."

"Oh, I don't know, it's not so bad." She drew a long breath and moved the hand he was groping for. "Say, Walt, Steve was tellin' me his mother's sick."

"Yep, got rheumatism; can't get out of bed. Steve's got housekeepin' down fine, they say."

"But who—cooks for him, them—when he's so busy? Where's little sister?"

"Old Julia, our washwoman, cooks for them when they can get her. I guess Steve manages; he don't fuss around much with girls or anything. Little sister Lola is—well, I guess that kid is worryin' Steve a lot just now. She's been goin' around with some fat drummer and they say he's got a wife. Steve's dead crazy about Lola, too."

Mildred did not reply, and presently Walt moved again restlessly.

"You didn't say whether you liked this shirt or not," he ventured. "Ain't the socks a dandy match?"

"Fine."

"Have any of your city beaux got anything on me when it comes to dressin', Mil?"

"Not a thing, Walt. You look just like—some of them."

"Gosh, New York must pay good salaries," he muttered ruefully, thinking of his debt to Harry Anderson.

And what would he do with all the truck when Mildred was gone? It was a darned nuisance dressing up every day, and as for matching shirts and ties and hose and handkerchiefs—*good-night!*

"We'll all go out to the White City Saturday, Mil," he said then, nettled at her unusual abstraction. "The bunch will go—want to?"

"Sure—anything, Walt."

IV.

"MIL and Steve are gettin' thick, Walt," Anderson teased some days later when Leeds dropped in at the store after

lunch. "She don't seem to care how he looks. Met 'em walkin' toward the plant ten minutes ago. She had on a middie—no class to that, is there?"

"Oh, I guess—I guess she's glad not to dress up in the mornings like she has to in town," said Mr. Leeds weakly. "She was class enough last night. We're goin' to the White City to-night. Can't Nan and you comê along? I'll settle that little bill, Harry, as soon as—"

"Don't let that worry you, Walt; your credit's good," grinned Anderson good-naturedly. "Sure, Nan and I'll go along. See you at School and High at eight?"

"Yep, I guess so. Ed and Bess are going, too. Gosh, I'll miss Mil when she leaves."

"Can't you persuade her to stay in Wedgely, Walt?"

"I've tried to ask her twice, but she wouldn't let me," sighed Mr. Leeds. "I'm gonna try again to-night."

"Sure—that's right—never say die!"

Mrs. Race, Mildred's stout mother, came to the door that evening when Walter called for her daughter.

"I ain't no idea where our Mil is, Walt," she told him, peering up and down the street. "She ain't been in since right after supper. My, don't you look grand! And she didn't tell me where she was off to. Will you set a spell and wait?"

Walter Leeds, mystified and a bit hurt, "set a spell" in a stiff rocker in his white flannels, his navy-blue coat and tie and hose, and twiddled his straw hat with its navy-blue band. Presently, when his watch told him it was ten minutes to eight, Mildred Race came down the street, a slim, white, fluttering form between the bars of moonlight and the velvet shadows the great trees threw.

She had on a little demure gray dress and a pale-pink silk sweater, and she was breathing rapidly, one hand on her breast.

"My stars, Walt, if I had a weak heart I'd drop dead at your feet!" she giggled, leaning against the vine-twisted pillar near him—her face flushed prettily. "I did some Marathon, believe me! Knowin'

you were on the point of suicide. Wait until I get a hat and powder my nose and we'll run right along."

And she was gone, like a flash into the house before Walter could voice the question he had some right to ask.

On the way to the trolley he asked it.

"Oh," said Mildred carelessly. "I dropped in on one of the girls. Gee, Walt, is that Nan Dawson with Harry Anderson? Got the contour of a cushion, hasn't she? If I ever come to that—"

Miss Race drew a long breath and hitched up the fluffy white furs closer about her little rounded chin.

"You'll never come to that," said Walter Leeds, with finality as they reached the other couples, standing at the corner of School and High Streets.

The White City was much as other white cities; mostly yellow glitter. Perilous dips and paths outlined in flaunting lights against the skies, here the swaying, enticing music of the "Habanera" from "Carmen," there the more enticing notes of the latest fox trot, and over to one side a little artificial lake outlined in light, and decorated by various row-boats and a launch or two.

Among those who "trotted" untiringly at ten cents a trot, were Mildred Race and her "crowd."

Mildred had not been herself, according to her escort, all the evening. She was quiet and abstracted; even her feet forgot themselves now and then, and when that happened Walter grew really perturbed.

Something must be wrong. He felt vaguely angry with Mildred in that she was not exerting herself to make his evening pleasant. After all he had spent on his clothes for her sake—Holy smoke! A girl had a right to laugh when a man said something smart anyhow.

Presently. "Let's go have a soda, Walt," Mildred suggested right when he was noisily demanding another encore.

"Don't you want the rest of this—" he began, but she was threading her way through the swaying couples to the door. "Sick, Mil?"

She threw him a flashing smile, the first he had seen that evening.

"No. Gee, Walt, you've got a pace that belongs to New York!" she grimaced saucily. "Here comes the bunch. I'm askin' Walt for a soda, Ed, and he don't want to buy me one! Whadda ya think of that?"

Among the couples who sat at the mushroomlike little table in the open-air refreshment parlor was a slim, doll-faced girl who was plainly not over eighteen, and a stout gray-flanneled party old enough to be—well, a very big brother, at any rate.

The girl was pathetically pretty, with the big eyes, and tiny mouth that belong to youth, eager to learn but wistfully afraid. The man was desperately attracted and very attentive, and the girl looked at him now and then and flushed prettily.

Mildred Race had not put her spoon in her ice cream soda before she saw them.

"Walt!" she pinched Mr. Leeds sharply below the elbow. "I guess that's Lola's drummer, ain't it?"

Walter Leeds remarked the curiously tight look about her pretty mouth.

"Sure it is; they're everywhere. He's rushin' her. Everybody says his wife 'll get on, and then—"

"What's his name?" asked Mildred.

"Dawson, I believe. What's the matter, Mil?"

"Why the devouring interest in the stout party, Mildred?" added Harry Anderson, leaning across the table.

"Does anybody know where he's from?" Mildred asked, her eyes still on Steve Farrel's little sister.

"Sure—Buffalo."

"Where you going?" demanded Walter as Mildred rose, pushing away her soda.

"I'll be back in a minute," she nodded. "I'm going to get that little baby-doll and take her home."

And before her party could voice any protest or do more than stare at one another, she was half-way over to the other table.

"How are you, Mr. Dawson?" she be-

gan cordially, her hand extended, "You don't know me, but I've met your wife; she's shown me your picture often enough for me to recognize you right off, and Mr. Leeds told me I was correct. We make a lot of strangers here in Wedgely, you know; it's our way. And then, having met Mrs. Dawson—oh, hello, Lola!"

The fat drummer was on his feet, very red of face, mechanically pumping Mildred's slim hand up and down. Lola Farrel was staring at him with horrified eyes.

"Mildred, you're wrong—Mr. Dawson isn't married," she got out primly through her pretty, tremulous lips, and Mildred laughed musically.

"Nonsense, Lola, I know Mrs. Dawson very well. I visit in Buffalo, Mr. Dawson."

Apparently the stout drummer had had no idea of denying the calm statements of this breezy, cordial, innocent-eyed young woman, and he just as apparently had next to nothing to say.

"Why, you—you were asking me to marry you!" cried Lola, rising excitedly. "What did you mean? Answer me—are you married?"

"Come, Lola deary, you come home with us," soothed Mildred Race, putting an arm about Steve's little sister fondly. "Of course Mr. Dawson is married—I know his wife—didn't you hear me say so? Tell the little girl you're married, Mr. Dawson."

Dawson stared suspiciously at Mildred Race's smiling face, and somehow under her smile he sensed something he distinctly did not like.

"Why—er—I—I was just kiddin' you along, Lola," he tried to grin. "Of course I'm married. I meant to tell you when I—"

"That'll be about all from you," cut in Mildred sharply, and now she was not smiling. "And I'd advise you to walk while there's nothin' behind you to make you run. I've got some perfect gentlemen with me over there who might be a bit interested in your immediate departure, and as for this kid's brother, well—say!"

Mildred paused dramatically, and Mr. Dawson seized the opportunity and his hat—and walked hastily out upon the crowded promenade. Lola caught Mildred's arm convulsively.

"Oh, Mildred—he was asking me—" she began hysterically, but Mildred patted her shoulder.

"I know. Didn't I time my entrance just right? Now you come right over with me and after Walt buys you a sundae and me some more ice cream, for I guess what I left is now mere soup, we'll all take you home, deary, where you ought to be cookin' for your mother and Steve. I'm not goin' to read you any sermon, Lola Farrel, but your place is surely in the home from now until your mother can walk—and then some."

V.

THE following evening, when Walter Leeds called on Mildred Race he knocked vainly upon the screen door, and at last sought out her shambling father in the back yard.

Mrs. Race, washing the dinner dishes, came out at the kitchen door in a big soiled apron.

"Land, is Mil gone again?" she demanded. "Father, don't you know where Mil's went to? She was on the porch a while back, Walt. Don't you dress just fine these days! Come in and set a spell, do."

But Walter Leeds had "set" his last "spell" waiting for the truant daughter of the house of Race, and he withdrew after an aimless inspection of old man Race's vegetable bed, and a glance at his watch whose hands pointed maliciously to nine-thirty.

Mildred had know he was coming to-night and he was angry and hurt. She had given him the shake, after all he had spent on clothes to make a hit with her.

It would take him months to crawl out of debt; he would have to forego lunches and cigars. That was a fine way to treat a fellow. And she was taking a mighty big interest in the Farrel's; biggest fool

thing he ever saw, taking Lola Farrel away from that fat drummer and bringing her home last night.

The big-eyed kid would find another drummer. Why was Mildred Race so darned interested? The bunch would talk about it for a month. Could it be that Steve Farrel—?

Here Mr. Walter Leeds, in his spotless flannels, paused a moment in the quiet street, and laughed aloud and scornfully.

That guy in his paint-splashed old brown suit! After the sports Mildred Race had tearing around after her in New York — after *him*—Walter Leeds — who had outspotted any of those city dudes in this one dazzlingly extravagant week?

Nev—ar!

He was walking moodily past the Race house the next evening, early, when Mildred came running down the path to him. She wore the middie Harry Anderson had spoken of and the ear-rings were not in evidence.

"Oh, Walt, you must be furious at me!" she gasped when she reached him.

She laid one small hand on her throat, and the other on his arm, looking at him appealingly from under those long lashes.

"Ma says you are, but I told her we were too good friends for that. All these years—a little thing like that—"

"A little thing!" All his hurt was in the three words. "Mildred, where were you last night?"

"Down at Farrel's, Walt. You see, Steve came by here in such a hurry after supper I asked him what was wrong, and he said his mother was very sick and he was going to get Mrs. Beasley to sit with her while he went back to work. Lola was locked in her room crying. Walt, you know old Mrs. Beasley, how awful she is—if I was sick she'd kill me! So I—I just said I'd go and I—went. That's all. She was awfully sick, but she's better now."

"Gee whiz, you went—" The Wedgely street swam before his hurt eyes. "Mildred Race, that was the limit! Do you know how that looks? You shook me to

go sit with Steve Farrel's mother! And after what you did before our bunch for Steve Farrel's sister night before last! It's a good thing you don't live in Wedgely, for after this—"

Mildred flushed sweetly and a bit angrily.

"But I'm going to live in Wedgely, Walt—for I'm going to marry Steve. Why—I could never go back to New York and leave him in such a fix, not on your sweet life! His poor old mother, so sick and helpless, and that fool kid, that Lola child—I guess not!"

Walter Leeds fell back feebly against the fence that surrounded the Race home.

"Marry Steve! After me goin' in debt to dress to please you! Marry a boob that looks like he does!" he gasped, red and white by turns.

"Pooh! Steve Farrel could put on overalls and carry a hod and beat you all—all of you—to a finish for looks," retorted Mildred with cold amusement. "And he isn't afraid to work, that's one of the five million things about him I love. But I'm sorry you went in debt for clothes, Walt; that's a mighty fool thing to do."

—Mr. Leeds continued to stare at her pretty flushed face, and presently he pulled a seventy-five cent handkerchief from his pocket, the border of which ex-

actly matched his tie and hose, and proceeded to mop his brow.

"To think of a baby-doll like you takin' up with a fellow who wears the tramp get-ups Steve Farrel does!" he groaned helplessly.

"I'll tell you something," rejoined Mildred Race, seeing that she had really dealt him an overpowering blow. "I was so almighty sick of the dudes I'd been goin' with in New York, with everything on their backs, and nothing in their heads or the bank either, that I just had to love Steve for bein' so natural and such a relief. And speakin' of money in the bank—why! Then, too, he's had such a time with that poor sick old mother—why, I've got their suppers four or five nights now while Lola was gallivantin' with that fat drummer. Steve needs me anyhow. Somebody has to keep that kid sister by the fireside."

"Mil—dred!" called Mrs. Race from the front door, "if Walt and you has made it up bring him in to set a spell. I've got some cold lemonade here and some cookies."

Mildred Race held out a friendly little hand and smiled happily into his bewildered eyes.

"Come on in, Walt," she invited hospitably as she opened the gate.

MORNING SONG

MORNING at your window smiles;
 She has crossed the world for miles,
 Just to look at you—
 Brought you all her dew,
 Waits, her arms with roses laden,
 Just to look upon you, maiden—
 Oh, your eyes are blue!

Far across the eastern sky,
 When the stars began to die,
 For your lovely sake
 Softly did she take
 Shoes of pearl and came tiptoeing,
 Noiseless as a lily blowing—
 Just to see you wake!

Facing a Crisis

by



George C. Jenks

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

HARDEN BROOKE, a young farmer, has recently been appointed justice of the peace for Bells-ville, near Linhampton. Sam Vane, after capturing a thief in Brooke's woods, hands over to Brooke the booty—valuable jewelry, stolen from the home of Dr. Bates in Linhampton—which Harden stows away in his attic for safe-keeping overnight. Meanwhile he hires a tramp, Claude Miller, as a farm hand, but in the morning Miller is missing, and in the attic, near the spot where he has concealed the jewels, Harden finds, lying unconscious, Letha Severly, pretty school-teacher, who boards with Harden and his sister Marion. She says a man has frightened her in the night, but insists that it was not Miller.

Brooke tries to get on the trail of the latter through telephone Central, and meanwhile drives in to Linhampton seeking other clues, but does not dare admit he has lost the jewelry committed to his care. Thus he is set into a panic when, on his way home, Raymond Bates hails him to say that he is going to motor out to Brooke's place to identify and check up the jewelry in order to set his mother's mind at rest.

CHAPTER V.

A BARGAIN OFFER.

WHILE Harden Brooke had his own troubles this morning, Miss Letha Severly calmly conducted the studies of about a score of boys and girls at the little school-house half a mile from the farm.

There was nothing in Letha's appearance to suggest that she had passed through a terrifying experience during the night which might well have excused her absence from the school. In her well-fitting dark gown, relieved by a touch of white lace at throat and cuffs, and with her shining Titian hair in perfect order, she was quite as charming and efficient as usual, and the morning session moved

along with its accustomed smoothness. No one saw any difference in "teacher."

At noon there was the usual recess, and she had the room to herself, while the rampant crowd of youngsters, after consuming their lunches, played about outside.

She had just disposed of her own sandwiches and cake, put up for her by Marion, and had stepped to the window to gaze thoughtfully across the fields at the farmhouse which had suddenly become the scene of so much mystery, when the door opened and a heavy footfall made her turn.

She felt resentful at once toward the man who stood before her. She did not like his white eyelashes, nor his smirk,

This story began in the May Argosy.

nor his short nose, nor his eyes that were too close together.

His city-made check suit was too loud, and his yellow low shoes, with their sprawling silk laces and thick soles, were an offense. With quick feminine appraisal, she judged him to be not more than thirty.

"Miss Severly?" he interrogated, removing his straw hat with what he evidently meant to be a courtly flourish.

"Yes."

"Ah!"

He coolly turned the key in the door, and waved one hand toward the window, while he slicked down his light hair with the other.

"Some of the kids might want to come in," he explained, "and I have something important to say."

Letha still stood near the window, which was partly open. If the stranger had expected her to betray emotion at his words, or apprehension because he had locked the door, he was disappointed. She calmly waited for him to go on.

"My name is Marcus Tolman. I am in the law office of Strike & Boxall, in Philadelphia. When John Landon was charged with stealing five hundred dollars from the cashier's office at the Imperial Market, where he was employed three months ago, I handled the case for the firm. Landon got away. We know that he took the name of Claude Miller. I have succeeded in tracing him here to Bellsville."

"Well?"

"I did not get here till late last night, and I made the mistake of not arresting him as soon as I found out where he was. When I went to Harden Brooke's house this morning, I found he had skipped. It looks as if he might have been tipped off. Brooke could not tell me anything about him. I didn't tell him that Landon married your sister. But I knew you were teaching school here, and naturally I came to see what you have to say."

"What do you expect me to say?" she asked icily.

"Oh, now, Miss Severly, what's the use? I've got the goods on Landon, and I don't think it would be hard to prove that you helped him to get away from that farmhouse last night. I know you had a letter from Philadelphia yesterday afternoon, and I'm guessing that you were told I was coming, and were asked to give Landon word of it if you saw him."

"Your guesses are interesting. But I have no comment to make. If this is all you have to say, I'll—"

She finished the sentence by walking past him, quite unhurriedly, and unlocking the door.

"Don't open the door yet," he requested, his smirk wider than ever. "I've only told you part of what I've come to tell. You'll find the rest of it even more interesting than my guesses. It may be chance that has brought you and John Landon to this place, but I am a lawyer, and I have a way of putting this and that together."

"I have to open the afternoon session of school in a few minutes," she interrupted.

"All right. I'll be brief. You came here at the request of somebody, probably your sister, to find out, if you could, whether her husband had any claim on the Harden Brooke farm, which was owned by a John Landon a hundred years ago. The present John Landon—or Claude Miller—came because he was down and out, and he thought you might give him a lift. Do you know Sam Vane, of Linhampton?"

"I've heard of him."

"Well, he's a mighty slick policeman, and he's helped me in this case. But to come to the point. I know where there is a will that gives the whole farm, with everything on it, to John Landon. The old man made the will after the one bequeathing the property to his daughter's son, who was Harden Brooke's grandfather. That's how it has come down to Brooke. He has no more right to that farm than I have."

"I don't see how that can be," she broke in, with sudden indignation. "I have been told that it had been allowed to run down—even worse than in the original John Landon's time—and that Mr. Brooke has worked hard on it for ten years to bring it to its present satisfactory condition. That should give him a right to the farm independently of any will."

"My dear girl—"

She flashed a look at him that caused him to change his form of address and seemed to jolt his watery eyes closer together.

"Miss Severly, I mean. There can be no right except under the law. I will show you—or tell you—where that will is, so that John Landon—and of course your sister—will get this farm. All I ask is a thousand dollars cash. The farm is valued at ten thousand. A thousand for my services is too little, but I want to see the rightful heir get his own. Then there is another consideration. I am here to have John Landon arrested and taken back to Philadelphia. If I make this arrangement with him, through you, why, I sha'n't be able to find him. You understand?"

He gave her a sly wink that made her fingers itch to bestow a ringing slap on his pasty face. All she did, however, was to take up the school bell from her desk.

"I see. School is going to take up again," he squeaked, his smirk widening. "Well, I'll come back at five o'clock for my answer, and I would advise you to be here then, if you want to keep your sister's husband out of jail. As for the will, I don't mind telling you that it isn't a thousand miles from the old farmhouse over there. Good-by for the present. I wish I could come to school to you. Only I'm afraid I'd be making love to my teacher."

Marcus Tolman made a quick exit. Perhaps it was well for him that he did. There was a heavy ebony ruler on Letha Severly's desk, and she dropped

the bell to reach for it just as the check suit followed the aggressive yellow shoes out of the door.

The girl shrugged her shoulders and laughed as the door closed. Nevertheless, two tears of angry annoyance appeared like dewdrops on her cheeks. She brushed them away quickly, but she could not brush away the feeling of humiliation caused by the interview that had been forced upon her. The coarseness of Mr. Tolman had seemed to exhale from his person, so that Letha felt actually sticky with it.

She glanced up at the clock. It was time to call the children in. But she did not take up the bell again just then. Instead, she locked the door and opened one belonging to a little room at the back of her desk which had been an extra class-room at one time, when the attendance was much larger, and which no one entered but herself.

"Come out, John," she called, in a low tone.

The person who stepped out was none other than John Landon, known to Harden Brooke as Claude Miller.

He wore the old coat and trousers in which he had dropped from the hay-loft the afternoon before. But he had on one of Harden's clean gray flannel shirts, and in his hand was the soft hat which Harden had carried up to his room at five o'clock in the morning.

"Has he gone?" was his anxious question.

"Yes, you can see him through the window going down the road to the village. I wish I could have got you other things besides the shirt and hat. But I couldn't. I wrapped those up in paper, and even then I felt as if I were not acting quite square with Marion."

"You always act square, Letha," he declared earnestly. "Does Tolman know I am still about here?"

"I'm afraid he does."

"What shall I do? I don't want to be lugged back to Philadelphia. They will find me guilty if ever they put me

on trial. I am innocent, but I don't see how I'm to prove it. Besides, there was that automobile I took to get away in. I left it at the side of the road when I saw a chance to jump a freight for the West. But they'll say I stole it just the same. I'm an unlucky devil. If it wasn't for Nettie and the kid I'd swipe a gun and end it all!"

"Say a thing like that again, and I'll do it for you myself, with this ruler!" threatened Letha, the impatience that goes with red-gold hair flaming up suddenly. "We've got to get that jewelry back to Harden Brooke before you can commit suicide. You know that, don't you?"

"I know you say it," grumbled Miller ungraciously.

"And I mean it."

"I hate to do it. I don't know whether I can. There are others who have something to say about that. How do I know that they will let me?"

She gave him a look that made him shuffle his feet nervously. This slight little sister-in-law of his always had had a way of making him stand around, when they all lived in Philadelphia. Now that he was in a worse fix than he ever had been in before, with three charges of robbery threatening, she was taking hold of his affairs with a firmness which he felt was the only thing that might save him from State's prison.

"Get back into that room till school is over," she ordered, as he looked at her pleadingly, very much like a dog expecting a whipping. "Then I'll tell you what you are to do. I must have a little time to think it all out."

"It never seems to me that you need to study a thing much. Your ideas come to you all worked out, and, by George, they are always good."

With this tribute he moved back into the little room, and she closed and locked the door. Then she rang the bell for the afternoon session.

Meanwhile Marcus Tolman, walking down the road, made his own plans, which

were not intended to benefit either Letha Severly or her weak-fibred brother-in-law.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURGLAR-PROOF SAFE.

AFTER leaving the Bates home, and the long-legged Raymond calling for his chauffeur, Harden drove to Bellsville at a speed that barely missed recklessness. Something had to be thought up to meet the horrible situation in which he found himself.

How was he to explain to Raymond Bates that he could not produce the jewelry for exhibition without admitting that it had been stolen again? Harden had faith in his own ability to run down the thief eventually, but in the mean time he must keep the loss of the jewels a secret. It would be bad enough to admit it when he had failed.

But he would *not* fail. Once let him get his hands on Claude Miller—which should not be difficult—and the booty would be recovered as a natural sequence.

He drove his car into the barn, and assuring himself, with a sigh of relief, that the Bates machine was nowhere in sight, he walked thoughtfully over to the house.

The telephone bell rang as he entered.

It was Gertie Kelly, calling to tell him that she had warned everybody west and south to look out for Claude Miller, and that they had all promised to do so.

"He hasn't been seen so far," she added. "You didn't find him in Linhampton, did you?"

"No," was his brief reply.

He wanted to shut off the garrulous Gertie, but it was not easily done. She liked to talk to the good-looking young farmer whom none of the girls had been able to charm and, besides, she was desperate in her curiosity to learn what was at the bottom of this Claude Miller affair. She suspected that it was much more important than Harden had intimated.

"Have you recovered any of the things he stole?" she asked.

"Not yet."

"I hope you will."

"I hope so. Good-by!"

"Do you think you will get the things back," persisted Gertie, before he could hang up.

"I think so."

He slapped the receiver on the hook, but it had not been there five seconds when the bell rang again.

"Deuce take it!" grumbled Harden.

"What does she want now?"

He took his time about removing the receiver, and the bell rang once more.

"Hello?" he snapped.

"It was a man's voice that responded this time with a sonorous "That you, Brooke? Raymond Bates speaking."

"This is Harden Brooke. Been expecting you up here? Where are you?"

"At home. Find I can't come up till the afternoon. Will be there, to look over my mother's stuff about four o'clock. Will that suit you?"

"Very well."

Harden contrived to say this in a carelessness, even cheerful, tone. It was putting off the evil moment for a little, but none the less he would have to face the music later, and it was with something approaching despair that he rang off, and went into the kitchen to speak to his sister.

"Haven't found him, Marion. But I have lines out, and I ought to round him up before night. I suppose you haven't heard anything?"

"Nothing," she answered, as she laid a sisterly hand affectionately upon his arm. "But you'll get him, I know. You always get what you go after. Why don't you hunt through the woods? That's where they found the other thief."

"I will. But I can't spend too much time scouring the country. I have that thirty acres of hay to cut this week. It will be too ripe if I don't get at it soon."

Marion nodded. She knew her brother would not allow even his anxiety over the robbery to stand in the way of his haying.

"Can't you get somebody to cut the hay?" she asked.

"I intend to do that, if I can. This is a busy season, but I might get that Morrison boy to help, if I can hire a man to run the mower. Morrison has three boys, and he might spare me Dick. I'll call him up this afternoon. But he won't be much use to me unless I can find a man."

He went out to the living room. The next moment he had flung himself upon an individual who stood at the open door of the staircase.

He was a heavy-set fellow of thirty-five or so, in the blue-jeans and shapeless soft hat of a farm laborer behind the times. His square, unshaven jaw was set in permanent truculence, emphasized by the glittering black eyes, under heavy brows.

When Harden seized him by his massive shoulders and swung him around, he glared as if wondering why he had been attacked.

"Now, Garrett, what are you after? Speak quick, before I smash you!"

Harden Brooke had had a great deal to disturb him, and his nerves were ajangle. He felt that it would do him good to thrash this discharged hired man of his, if there were the slightest excuse for it. He needed the exercise.

"I ain't doing anything, Harden," growled Garrett. "I was looking for you."

"Did you think I was up-stairs? Didn't you hear me talking in the kitchen? I was speaking loud enough. That's too thin. You were going to sneak up those stairs if I hadn't come in. I've a mind to land one on your jaw anyhow."

The steel thews of the young farmer stiffened, and he shook the burly Garrett with his left hand, while his right fist drew back as if setting for a blow.

"Hold on!" protested Garrett. "There ain't no call for you to get mad. I know you done right to fire me. I oughtn't to have kicked that horse, and I wouldn't

have done it if I hadn't been drinking. But I want to come back. I've had enough of the city. They're all after a fellow's coin. When they get it, they chuck him out on his head. You have haying to do. You've got to have somebody. I heard you say so."

"Oh, you heard that, did you?" interrupted Harden. "Then you knew I was in the kitchen. Well, I'll hire you for a week. But you must cut out the drink, and if I catch you hurting one of my horses again, I'll send you to the hospital. Get that?"

"All right. You can bank on me doing the right thing. You've got to say I can do as good a day's work as any man you ever had."

"How did you get here from Linhampton? Didn't walk, did you?" asked Harden suspiciously. "I didn't pass you on the road. I've just come from there."

"Caught a ride on an automobile. Reckon I was in front of you as you came home. That's why you didn't pass me. I came right up to the house, and found the door open. I was looking for you when you grabbed me."

"Well, come on and get out the mower. You'd better cut that fifteen acres in the north field along the State road first."

While Garrett went about his work with an industry and skilfulness only second to his employer's, Harden looked carefully through his big wood lot and assured himself that Claude Miller was not there.

All the rest of the day he spent in riding about in his car, visiting many of his neighbors and making constant inquiries. He had no success, and it puzzled him. What had become of the man?

About three o'clock, he came to the schoolhouse on the Town Line road. He could not help pulling up, to look through the window.

He had a blurred vision of groups of restless heads and shoulders, but could not find Letha's among them. He was just going on, when the door opened and she stood on the threshold.

"I haven't found Miller," he announced; "haven't seen him, have you?"

His tone and manner were matter-of-fact, but there was a glint in his eyes as he looked at the flushed cheeks of this girl who had stirred him more in a few days than all the Gertie Kellys had been able to do in years.

"You have a man working for you, haven't you?" she asked, evading his query. "I see somebody in that field above the barns. I thought it was you till you stopped here."

"It's Garrett, the man I discharged for drunkenness. He asked to come back, so I put him to work cutting hay. But I don't think I shall keep him. He's a surly fellow, and I don't care to trust him with my horses."

"Will he sleep in the house?"

"No. I'll give him a cot I have in the loft over the stables. He used to sleep there about half the time when he was with me before. He would rather be there than in a regular bed. He's tramped and beaten his way all over the country—worked in Dakota for two years—and he says the best bedroom in the world is a moving box-car. Well, I won't keep you from your school. If you should happen to hear anything of Miller—but, of course, you won't. How could you?"

He acknowledged her smiling "Good-by" with a wave of his gloved hand and drove down the road to his farm. As he got there he saw a big gray car gliding easily to a smooth halt in front of the barn, and Raymond Bates hailed him from a seat by the side of the driver.

"Here we are, Brooke. Hope I haven't kept you waiting."

Well, the crucial moment had arrived. Now, what was he to do?

"I suppose you have the jewelry at the house. Run the car to the side of the road, Turner!" he directed his chauffeur. "Now, Brooke, if you're ready."

Raymond Bates had been accustomed all his life to having things done for him as he wanted without trouble to himself.

He had told Harden that he would be there to identify the jewelry belonging to his mother, and he never doubted that it would be produced.

He sauntered up the lawn by the side of Harden, chatting on indifferent matters, entirely at his ease. He did not notice that his companion's sun-browned face showed a peculiar white spot in the middle of each cheek, or that the lips were drawn so tightly over the teeth that they, too, were a purplish-white.

Marion peeped at them from her kitchen, and there was anxious sympathy in her eyes as they met the fixed gaze of her brother. Then she went back and shut the door. She could do nothing, but somehow she had faith that Harden would find some way out of his dilemma.

Indeed, he had hit upon a plan that would give him more time. That, he felt, was all he needed. Time! If he could have a day or two, he would find this wretched tramp who had stolen the treasure. He led his visitor into the office.

"Ah, I see! In that safe!" exclaimed Bates, nodding approval. "It looks strong enough to hold a king's ransom. Open her up, Brooke."

Harden went over to the safe and turned the knob, as if he were working the combination. He did this for more than a minute. Then he stood up and looked in dismay at Bates.

"What's the trouble, old top?" asked Raymond. "Forgotten the numbers?"

"It ought to open," murmured Harden, as if reflectively. "I'll try it again."

With deliberate care, as it seemed, he turned the knob a certain number of times each way, watching closely to see that the pointer always stopped at the right place. Then he tried the handle, as he had done before. But the safe would not open.

"It must be out of order," he said in a distressed tone. "Unlucky, when you want to see the jewelry so particularly. Perhaps I didn't do it right. I'll try once more."

But the next attempt was without result. So were two more that he made.

"Sure you know the combination?" asked Bates, lighting a cigarette and immediately throwing it to the floor and stamping out the fire in his impatience. "Maybe you have the wrong figures. Have you got them written down?"

"No. But I'm quite sure of them. I've used them a dozen times since I've had the safe. But this isn't the first time it hasn't worked. I may have to get a man to come from Syracuse to open it. I can't do it to-day, however. We'd better call it off for this time, and I'll telephone you when I get the door open."

Never till now had Harden Brooke supposed he could pretend so successfully. It was his disposition to be entirely open and straightforward. Yet here he was, twiddling a knob that he knew had nothing to do with fastening the safe, and doing it with an air of sincerity that astonished him.

"I hate to come up here again," objected Bates. "The mater will go into hysterics if I cannot satisfy her this afternoon that her precious gimcracks are all right. You don't know my mother, or you wouldn't propose to stand her off even for a day when she is set on a thing."

Harden Brooke was rather glad he did not know the lady, if she were likely to be more insistent than her son, but he did not say so. Instead, he made one more pretense of trying to unlock the safe, and shrugged his shoulders with a most edifying look of disappointment when he failed.

"It's no use, Mr. Bates. We'll have to give it up for to-day. I am sorry, but you see for yourself that it can't be helped. That's the worst of these burglar-proof safes. When they *do* get out of order, it takes an expert mechanic to get the door open."

Bates was not at all inclined to accept this unsatisfactory decision, however.

"But," he protested. "It seems to me— Perhaps I can—"

Before Brooke realized what he intended to do, Raymond stepped past him, and seizing the knob and handle of the safe, gave them a violent pull simultaneously.

The door swung open!

"Wow!" ejaculated Bates, with a triumphant grin. "Is the inside door unlocked?"

It was unlocked. Flinging it back, he hurriedly investigated the interior, which obviously contained nothing but the scattered law books and papers.

He turned on Harden Brooke accusingly.

"Where is it?" he demanded. "There is no jewelry in this safe. And, by the Lord Harry!" he shouted, "this combination knob is nothing but a bluff!"

CHAPTER VII.

LETHA'S ENIGMA.

LETHA SEVERLY was not sorry that Marcus Tolman came at four o'clock, instead of five, as he had said he would. School had been dismissed, and the girl was sitting at her desk, lines of perplexity between her perfectly-arched brows and a far-away expression in her eyes, when he knocked at the door.

Then she saw that a horse and buggy were outside her window, and she recognized it as the property of the blacksmith in the village.

"Come in!" she called.

Tolman smirked at her confidently. Then he struck what he felt was an easy attitude. Leaning on a desk with one hand and crossing one yellow shoe elegantly over the other, he fanned himself with his straw hat.

"My appointment was for five o'clock," he reminded her. "But I borrowed the rig you see out there, and got here ahead of time. I saw the children leave, so I ventured to knock."

He waited for a response, but she did not speak, and he continued, briskly: "As a lawyer, it is my custom to come

directly to the point. What is your answer? Will you pay me a thousand dollars for that will? It will give John Landon the farm, and make your sister comfortable financially for the first time since she married him."

The reply came short and sharp:

"No."

For a moment he appeared to be dumfounded. Then he asked, with ostentatious meekness:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Severly. Are you authorized to decline my offer?"

"Yes."

If she could have expressed her contempt more forcibly than by answering him in monosyllables, she would have done so.

A look of ratlike cunning sprang into his little eyes, spreading slowly over his whole visage.

"Ah! You *are* authorized?" he said smoothly. "Then you must have seen John Landon since this morning?"

She saw that he was trying to trap her, but there was no sign of trepidation as she returned coldly: "There is nothing else, I believe?"

He moved toward the door.

"Only that it was part of my offer to quash the Philadelphia charges against John Landon, alias Claude Miller. Don't forget that."

She did not reply, and, with his oily smirk in full working order, belying the malice in his shifty eyes, Tolman walked out.

Through the window she watched him drive down the road until he reached the bend which would take him to Bellsville. Then, locking the outer door, she opened the one belonging to the little room, and spoke to her brother-in-law, without letting him come out.

"You are quite sure of what you told me this morning?" she began in low, distinct tones. "The man who came from the window of the farmhouse gave something to the other one who was waiting?"

Hugging himself together with a shiver of vague terror—he passed a limp hand

across his mouth, and replied in a tone of puerile petulance:

"Of course I'm sure. The moon hadn't quite gone down. It was a little package done up in paper. I heard the paper crackle. The other man opened it and held up something that glittered and sort of tinkled. 'Hello,' says I. 'That guy must have pinched Brooke's jewelry while he was in there! Gee!' says I."

"Never mind what you said," she broke in. "What did the men do?"

Claude Miller looked pained, and his loose under lip quivered, as if he were about to make a tearful remonstrance. But she didn't give him time.

"The quickest way will be for me to repeat your story as you told it this morning, and if I make any mistakes, you can correct me. But do it in very few words. If you are to keep out of prison, we must hurry."

"But, Letha—" he whined.

"Keep quiet and listen," she admonished. "When I saw Harden Brooke taking you up to your bed-room last night I had no chance to speak to you. But I'd had the letter from Margaret telling me that Tolman was coming here after you."

"How did he know I would be here, and who told Margaret?"

She silenced him with a flash of her dark eyes, and went on, rapidly:

"My poor sister cares for you, though you're such a poor excuse for a man that I don't know why."

"I've always been good to her," he bleated. "When I had work, and before they framed that job on me at the Imperial Market, I gave her all I made, and—"

"So, early this morning," she continued, "I did what I'd been trying to work up courage for all night. I went up to your room and told you to get away and come here to the school."

"Yes, that was a good thing. I gave you back the key, didn't I?"

The tendency of his mind to run on small things was characteristic. She did

not trouble to answer, but warned him with a gesture to pay attention.

"When you got to the ground, you lay down behind the bushes, to make sure nobody had seen you. Soon these two men came over the lawn, and one of them climbed up to your window. He was in the house about ten minutes—"

"Fifteen, I should say."

"Well, fifteen. Then he came down and gave the package to the waiting man."

"That's how it was," assented Miller, eagerly. "They talked for a while, fussing about who should keep the package. Then the guy who had it—not the one who had been in the house—swore and said something I didn't hear, except I got the word 'Syracuse,' and thought he talked about a 'bank' and 'safe.' I know he said 'box.' But it was all jumbled up and he talked down in his throat. There was something about 'merchandise' or 'mercantile,' too."

"That will do. You'll stay here till I come back with some food. I don't know how long I shall be. Mind you don't show yourself at the window."

She had opened the door, and after cautiously surveying the road both ways, was about to step out, when Claude Miller laid a tremulous hand on her arm.

"Look here, Letha! You know I didn't do that thing in Philadelphia, don't you?" he pleaded.

"If I didn't feel certain of it, I wouldn't raise my hand for you—not even for my sister's sake," was her clean-cut answer, as she went out and closed the door, listening to make sure he turned the key inside.

Any one who might have seen this trim, pretty girl walking easily down the road in the direction of the Harden Brooke farm, loose ends of her shining hair blowing about her cheeks, would certainly have been attracted by her elflike beauty. On the other hand, he would have ridiculed the suggestion that weighty matters were on her mind.

As she entered the house loud voices in the office made her pause.

Raymond Bates and Harden Brooke were talking over the absence of the jewels from the safe, and it was evident that the former was suspicious, yet Brooke's reputation for absolute honesty and unblemished integrity had spread far beyond the bounds of Bellsville.

"But how do you account for it, Mr. Brooke?" Raymond demanded, as Letha reached the half-open door. "You said the jewelry was in this safe, and that the only reason you could not show it to me was that you couldn't get the door open. Yet, when I opened it—very easily, considering that you couldn't do it with all your trouble, there was nothing inside but a few books and bundles of law papers. The question is, where are my mother's jewels?"

Mechanically, Harden fumbled among the papers in the safe, while his mind worked busily. He could not see a way out, but it was some relief not to be obliged to look into Raymond Bates's incredulous face. Harden was not used to deception.

"You can't find them, can you?" barked Raymond.

"No. They certainly are not here."

"Well, then, what is your theory?"

Raymond Bates was the son of a wealthy man, and most of his time was devoted to the mere joy of living. But he had inherited the business instinct, and his tones were hard.

"There is only one theory," replied Harden. "That is, that the jewelry must have been stolen for the second time."

"That seems to be the only explanation," assented Raymond, with a keen look. "Yet I don't understand why you could not open the door, when it gave way at my first pull."

"That is very simple. Everybody knows that often a defective lock will stick fast for a long time, and then, all at once, without any apparent reason, yield of its own accord. This safe lock has its whims, like any other."

It was at this moment that Harden caught sight of Letha standing at the door,

He was quick to seize an opportunity, by speaking to her, to turn Raymond Bates's thoughts in another direction for a few moments.

"Good afternoon, Letha!"

"Good afternoon," she responded. "I beg your pardon if I am intruding. But I could not help overhearing you say that you had missed some valuable property, and—"

"Mr. Raymond Bates—Miss Severly," interrupted Harden, introducing them.

She smiled graciously upon the tall Mr. Bates, and he, embarrassed by the unexpected advent of a beautiful young woman, blushed until his neck, face, and particularly his out-standing ears, were in a condition of violent inflammation.

"Miss Severly is my cousin—several times removed," explained Harden.

"Indeed? You are to be pit—I mean, envied, of course. Ahem! Ah! I—er—beg your pardon!" stammered Raymond.

While young Mr. Bates—never quite composed in the presence of a pretty girl—floundered miserably in his endeavor to present a graceful front, Letha conveyed to Harden, with a slight raising of her brows and a lightning dart from her dark eyes, that he must follow her lead.

"Was it the beautiful necklace and things you showed me last night that you were looking for in that safe, Harden?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes," cut in Raymond, becoming more coherent when business took the place of social exchanges. "They belonged to my mother. They were taken from our house by a burglar, who was captured. Later they were placed in the care of Mr. Brooke. I came here to identify them. But when we opened the safe—"

"They were not there," interrupted Letha, still smiling. "I could have told you that before you looked."

"You?" broke out Harden. "Why, what can you know about—"

"Mr. Bates," she continued, calmly, ignoring Harden's interjection, "that safe is not to be trusted. You have seen that for yourself. The jewelry belonging to

your mother is in a safe deposit box in Syracuse."

"In Syracuse?"

"Yes. Mr. Brooke has been away all day. His sister and I both know that anybody can open that safe if he tries long enough. Was it not natural for his sister, and I, his cousin, to take the liberty of conveying such a treasure to a place of real safety? And what safer place can there be than the vaults of a bank?"

Turning to Harden, she added, with smiling contrition. "I hope you won't be angry with us. But you can assure Mr. Bates that the jewelry is in a safe deposit box in Syracuse, and that it can be produced when required."

"Well, when can I see it?" asked Raymond. "My mother—"

"Is it necessary for you to see it at all?" she asked, quickly.

"Only to identify it."

"But," she smiled. "Mr. Brooke has no package of jewelry except what was taken from your house by the burglar, so there can't be any question that it is Mrs. Bates's property. You can set her mind at ease by telling her it is in a place of perfect security in a Syracuse bank."

"What bank is it?"

"My safe deposit box is in the Second Mercantile," she replied.

There was a pause, during which Raymond Bates tried not to look conscious that she was gazing at him with mischievous amusement. At last he blurted out:

"Very well, Miss Severly. I will tell my mother. It was—er—very good of you to take so much interest in the matter. I appreciate it, I am sure."

"Well, to be frank, Mr. Bates, I did it for my cousin, Harden, more than for you. Still, I am glad that you approve what I've done. I only hope Harden won't scold me too much when you have gone.")

This was a hint that Raymond Bates felt obliged to take. There was no excuse for his remaining any longer. So he stammered out a confused "Thank you,

Miss Severly. Good afternoon!" and managed, somehow, to get out of the office and the house.

As the big car surged away, in a cloud of smoke and dust, Harden Brooke turned to Letha, with a puzzled smile that was quite without mirth.

CHAPTER VIII.

LETHA HAS HER HANDS FULL.

"THAT was an ingenious way of helping me out, Letha," said Harden, looking curiously at her. "But it is only a temporary expedient. What shall we do when he finds we've been lying to him?"

"Who says we've been lying?" she countered, with an enigmatic smile. "Some stories that seem doubtful are marvelously like the truth. Don't you think Mr. Bates believed me?"

"Perhaps. But it will be easy for him to telephone the Second Mercantile Bank in Syracuse, and find out whether you have a safe deposit box there or not."

"He can't very well telephone to-night. By the time he gets back to Linhampton there will be nobody at the bank except the night watchman, and he won't know."

"That's true!" admitted Harden, reflectively. "But he can get the bank in the morning, and it will come to the same thing. For that matter, there may be somebody there to-night who can give him the information. It won't be late when he reaches home. I know you meant well, but when he learns that you have no box at the Second Mercantile, he will be so suspicious that I am afraid the whole truth will come out. Look at it as I may, I can see only that I am in a very bad fix."

"Not so bad but that you can get out of it if you follow carefully the clues in your hands."

"There will be no time for that, I'm afraid. What I have to do first of all is to hide from the Bateses the fact that you have no box at the bank. There is only one way to do that, and it will be an off chance."

"What is that way?"

"For you to be in Syracuse when the bank opens in the morning and rent a box. I should say Raymond Bates is not an early riser, and you may have the box in your name before he telephones. Of course the bank will tell him so, and he will be satisfied. He won't know how long you've had it."

Letha looked at the office door to satisfy herself that it was tightly closed. Then she broke into a ripple of laughter that Harden thought was the most musical sound he ever had heard—and this, too, in spite of his being worried almost to despair over his dilemma.

"Your plan has a great deal to recommend it," she conceded, as her laugh quieted down to the smile which always bewitched him. "But it is unnecessary."

"Unnecessary? What do you mean?"

"Only that I need not rent a box in the Second Mercantile Bank, because *I have a box there already.*"

"And are the jewels in it?"

"I did not say so."

"You told Raymond Bates they were."

"No. Not even that," she corrected. "Although I gave him that impression. If you will try to recall exactly what was said, it was this: After I had told him his mother's property was in a box in a Syracuse bank, he asked what bank."

"I remember, perfectly."

"And you recollect that I evaded his question by saying 'My safe deposit box is in the Second Mercantile.'"

"Yes, and of course he took it for granted—"

"Naturally. He supposed I meant the jewelry was in that box. I admit I wished him to think so. But, you see, I did not actually make such an assertion."

Harden Brooke drew in and emitted a long breath, and passed a hand across his forehead.

"This is too deep for me," he confessed. "What does it all mean? You really have a box in the Second Mercantile Bank?"

"Yes. I rented it two weeks ago. I have papers of some value, as well as

other articles that I do not care to carry around with me, and it has been my custom for a year or two to have a safe deposit box. It is not expensive, and it saves a great deal of anxiety."

"And are Mrs. Bates's diamonds there?"

"No. If they were, I should have told you at once. But," she added, quickly, as his face fell, "I'll tell you, for your comfort, that I am pretty sure they are in *some* safe deposit box in Syracuse."

"Why do you think so?"

"I can't tell you now. If you will trust me for a day or two, I feel sure I can lay my hand on the thief—or thieves, for there is more than one in the plot. But I must be allowed a free hand for the present."

Harden gazed earnestly at the fair, young face, with its sweetly-curved lips, and the eyes glistening with self-confidence. Then he decided that he must let her have her way.

"I will not interfere with you," he promised.

"Thanks."

She smiled reassuringly, and tripped away to talk to Marion in the kitchen.

As for Harden, although he had pledged himself not to hinder her plans by asking questions or making suggestions, he mentally reserved to himself the privilege of following any independent line of action that might lead to the recovery of the stolen treasure. The capture of the thieves, while important, was a secondary consideration.

He went out to the barns, where Garrett had already begun the feeding and bedding of stock, and other stable tasks that come under the general head of "chores."

There was no conversation between the two men. But Harden helped in the work in a matter-of-fact way, giving an occasional, brief direction, which Garrett acknowledged with a grunt. So it was not long before everything was done, including the milking and pasturing of the cows, and Harden strode over the lawn for supper.

"Am I to come, too?" growled Garrett.
"I suppose I get supper, don't I?"

His employer did not relish having this surly, ill-conditioned fellow at the table with Marion and Letha. But there was no way out of it, and five minutes later Garrett was washing his face and hands outside the kitchen door, waiting for the call to the meal.

Supper was nearly over, with nobody speaking except in monosyllables, when Garrett turned to Harden.

"Ain't heard anything about that fellow who got away with your stuff last night, have you—the man who was working for you?"

"No," was Harden's short reply.

"He must have climbed down the ivy out of his window, eh?"

"I don't know."

Garrett scowled at the non-communicative Harden, but did not press his questions. Soon he had finished his meal, and getting up from the table abruptly, without a word shambled out of the house, to lounge about until it should be time for him to seek his cot in the hay-loft.

"I didn't suppose he knew anything about the robbery," said Harden, as he watched his hired man going down the lawn. "Who told him?"

"I saw him talking to the driver of that motor-car that brought Mr. Bates," answered Marion. "Afterward, when Mr. Bates started home, Garrett was leaning over the car—asking something, I suppose, for I saw Mr. Bates speaking to him, and Garrett nodded."

"Raymond Bates is one of those loose-mouthed idiots who doesn't know enough to keep his business to himself," commented Harden. "I've no doubt he told Garrett all about it."

Letha said nothing. She left the room while Marion and her brother were still talking, and hastily collected what food she could in the kitchen, for the hungry Claude Miller, whom she had left waiting for her in the school-house.

It was dark when she got there, but she did not light any of the lamps. She

knew her way about well enough to find her way to the door of the room in which she had instructed her brother-in-law to stay.

It was only when she found that the door was wide open, and that he did not answer when she called him—both as "Claude Miller" and "John"—that she struck a match and looked about her.

There was no one in the building but herself!

Involuntarily she let the match burn down almost to her fingers before she blew it out.

She lighted another quickly, for as the flame died down on the first one she had noticed a small folded paper on her desk. There were other papers there, which had prevented her observing it before.

She read the few penciled words on it before her second match was exhausted. They were:

Had to leave. Will see you later.

JOHN.

For a minute or more she stood in the darkness, reflecting. She was certain, to begin with, that her brother-in-law had not left of his own volition. Somebody had come and made him go. It must have been Marcus Tolman.

She decided, also, after very short consideration, that Tolman had not arrested him. In the first place, he was not a police officer, so could not do so legally, and again, if her weak-kneed relative were a prisoner of the law, he would have said so.

She took her regular seat behind her desk, to think it out further. At the end of five minutes, she had come to a conclusion.

Getting up briskly, she left the school-house, and as she closed the door, which fastened with a spring lock, she stood and listened.

Not a sound indicated the proximity of any one about but herself. So, still carrying the parcel of food she had brought with her, she went back to the farm-house.

"Harden has gone out with his car," announced Marion. "He said he might not be home till late."

CHAPTER IX.

CROSS PURPOSES.

"**A**RE the doors and windows of the house all secured?" asked Letha, when the two young women had settled down in the spacious living-room, Marion sewing and Letha with a book. "I do not trust that man Garrett."

"Neither do I," returned Marion. "That is why I have locked and bolted the outside doors and the stair door. I can't do anything up-stairs, except shut down the window of the room belonging to the hired man, because everything is open up there. But we can prevent anybody getting down to us."

"And there is nothing up there that could be stolen?"

"Nothing that I know of."

Letha smiled and shook her head.

"You did not know the Bates jewelry was up there. Yet it was, and it seems other people knew it as well as Harden. I should like to look about that upper story, if you will come with me. We might come across something else that would attract burglars now that Harden is away."

"I wouldn't go up there to-night for a million dollars," declared Marion. "But I do not expect burglars to come again. Who is to know that Harden isn't at home? He often goes down to the village with his car in the evening, and unless some one is watching, nobody could say when he comes back."

"That's true," assented Letha. "But I should like to go up to that floor. Those old beams and the way they are laid have interested me very much."

"Not for me," was Marion's resolute negative. "If you want to go, do it. But I wouldn't, if I were you."

Letha dropped the subject and seemed to bury herself in her book. Occasionally

she and Marion would exchange a few words, but most of the time Letha's thoughts were racing along, as she tried to decide what her next move should be leading not only to the recovery of the jewels, but the capture of the thieves as well.

It would have been comparatively easy if her brother-in-law had not disappeared. With his help, she believed she held the key to the mystery. Now she would have to begin all over again.

At nine o'clock, Marion, who had been nodding for half an hour or more, declared that she must go to bed. She was too sleepy to see her needle, and she had to be up at five.

"Aren't you sleepy, Letha? You ought to be, for you had little rest last night, to say nothing of the awful time you put in with that strange man. Doesn't your head pain you?"

"Nothing to speak of," was Letha's careless response. "I am not at all sleepy just now. But I dare say I soon shall be. You go to bed, and I'll stay up and read a while longer. Perhaps Harden will be home. Then we shall both feel safer in our rooms. Is he certain to be very late?"

"I don't know. He's going on business about the robbery. I think he's heard something about that Claude Miller. Of course he is the thief. But Harden may be home soon. He only said he *might* be late. Well, I'll go to bed," she added, with a yawn, as she got up from her chair. "Good night, dear."

It was very lonely when Marion had gone into her room and closed the door, and Letha wondered why the wind always blew so much harder around the house than elsewhere.

For half an hour she sat, book in hand, listening. Then she got up and softly opened the door of Marion's room, which, like her own, adjoined the living-room. Marion was fast asleep.

It was now that Letha did a peculiar thing. She went into the office, where the big safe was the principal article of furniture, but which contained, besides, an

open roll-top desk, and took from a pigeonhole in the desk an electric flashlight. Then she opened the door of the stairway and went softly to the floor above.

She shuddered as she passed the open trap above the stairway, and had difficulty in repressing a scream when some unseen creature flapped loudly almost in her very face. But she held herself in and indulged in a little smile at her own fear. She remembered that bats held high carnival at night in this ghostly place. Harden Brooke had told her so more than once.

The bat flew out of one of the big window openings, and Letha went about her investigations with businesslike composure.

That she was possessed of strong nerves, notwithstanding her delicate frame and sweet face, has been demonstrated already. She felt that she needed all her nerve now. On the other hand, she did not hesitate in the task she had set herself, which was to find the will for which Marcus Tolman had demanded a thousand dollars.

He had been indiscreet enough to admit that it was "not a thousand miles" from the farmhouse, and Letha had soon come to the conclusion that if old John Landon had secreted it anywhere, most probably it was here among these ancient beams and rafters.

She had been up here before, and had noticed the star and arrow cut into the beams even before Marion, who had accompanied her, pointed them out. She had seen the initials, "J. L." too. When Tolman talked about the will, it was natural for Letha to associate these symbols and letters with the unknown hiding-place.

That Tolman had taken her brother-in-law away from the schoolhouse she felt sure. Also, she believed his disappearance had something to do with this will that Tolman meant to turn to his own profit.

Her purpose was to obtain possession of it before the rascal could get it. Then she could bargain with him on behalf of

the unfortunate John Landon, who was so pitifully unable to take care of himself.

The swinging beam under which had been hidden the Bates jewelry, and where Harden Brooke had found the old coins, was still displaced, and it did not take a girl of Letha Severly's quickness of apprehension long to understand the principle on which it had been made to move when properly manipulated.

She argued that other beams might be swung aside if one knew the secret of them. So she tried two of them, but without result. Then she turned the light of her flash on the arrow and star alternately, until, with a low ejaculation of satisfaction, she believed she had hit on the solution.

Examining the star closely, she noted that it had five rays. Also that one ray was noticeably longer than any of the others. Taking this as a guide, she found that it pointed to a place midway between two of the beams.

For a moment she was at a loss. Then, throwing her light upon the arrow, she observed that it aimed in the same parallel direction as the long ray of the star, but three feet to the left. Between the two imaginary lines was a beam.

A pause for inspection and calculation, and Letha was working to remove a wooden tongue like that which had been found by Harden in another beam, and which he had accidentally broken off.

It did not take her long to decide that she must have some sharp tool to get the tongue out. She looked about her, but there was nothing there. A little shrug of vexation, and down she went cautiously to the kitchen, where she knew a box of carpenter's tools was kept. In a few minutes she was up again, with a chisel and hatchet.

Naturally handy, it did not take her long, with the aid of these implements, to extract the tongue. Then, with slight exertion, she swung the beam aside and upward, revealing the same sort of cavity as that in which Harden had so vainly secreted the Bates jewelry.

She had just time to take out two folded papers, yellowed by age, and to replace the beam, with the tongue thrust back into place, when a slight scraping outside one of the yawning window openings made her switch off the light and hide behind a pile of old lumber in a far corner.

Listening intently, she knew that the scraping was caused by the placing of a

ladder against the outside wall. She could hear labored breathing, and then three men crawled in and stood still.

It was very dark, but the stars enabled her to make out the outlines of the three intruders. She saw that one was thin and rather tall, another shorter and stocky of build, and the third a burly individual who seemed to be in command.

(To Be Concluded.)

"It Was War"



by George M. A. Cain

I.

OF course, when a man is being paid a hundred and forty a month by a young millionaire as wireless operator on said millionaire's yacht, and he is only a second-rate amateur at wireless anyhow—it's hardly appropriate to step up to the gift horse, pull its teeth apart, and start criticising the beast.

But I maintained a certain degree of independence by quarreling with my boss about twice as often as I really wanted to. I had got through college on the money he had paid me to get him through.

"But, my Lord, man," I had once demanded of him, "what in the world are you getting out of your education?"

"An awful lot of fun, you old grind," Louis Hartman had retorted. "And the use of your brains is the least expensive part of most of it."

"But—what will you know?"

"Why should I know anything? Al-

ways sure of being able to hire somebody else to do the knowing."

It was wofully true. The millions old Gottfried Hartmann made out of sausage will keep Louis busy spending them for a long while—especially if he always hires somebody else to run the business.

Of course he didn't live down to his idiotic philosophy. If he had I'd never have accepted his invitation for that winter's cruise around the West Indies.

As I said before, I could afford to argue with him quite heatedly; but it wasn't my place to tell him where to take his yacht. But, when he dropped a light anchor half a mile off what looked like a big ash heap or coal dump with a fringe of unhealthy palms around it—having sailed four days from as sun-kissed and amusement-providing a little harbor as ever lured other yachtsmen like himself—I was ready to get down to personalities.

It was probably the last yachting trip I'd ever have. Then, having ordered the

tender lowered, he came up and slammed me on the back remarking:

"Some things worth being rich for after all, eh?"

"For Heaven's sake, what?" I demanded crossly. "That dump?"

"But your glass—haven't you used it?" he cried, fixing his own on a certain spot and keeping it very steady.

I had used mine—for a ten-second sweep over the whole of that unsightly pile—and had decided that further inspection wasn't worth the strain on my eyes. To humor him, I raised it again. It was one of Louie's many, and powerful enough to make Mars look like a good-sized marble.

And I happened to hit the spot at which Louie's glass was trained. Instantly I perceived that that ugly little island had a beauty all its own.

She was almost half-concealed by one of the decrepit palm's branches. But I could see two-thirds of her face, also an arm with the sleeve well above the elbow, likewise a glimpse of the belt that connected her shirtwaist with one of those narrow skirts they wore before they began to take half a yard off the bottom to make them fuller—and finally, a pair of natty, white boots that actually looked small.

I gave the screw of the glass half a turn, until she looked as if she were standing about ten feet away from me—and I was all for that island if I had to swim to it.

Then she raised a huge pair of binoculars and pointed them straight at us. For an instant I dropped my glass, and so did Louie. It's rude to stare at a pretty girl and have her see that you're staring.

"Huh!" grunted Louie. "She isn't acting a bit encouraging."

She wasn't. If ever gesticulations bade one to depart full speed ahead or astern, immediately, if not sooner, and to keep on departing, she was giving us the high sign to get scarce.

"But," Louie muttered, "I never was any good at reading signals. I think we'd better go over and make sure of what she means. Hey, Pete, is that ladder down?"

"All ready, sir," Pete responded.

"Come on, Harry," Louie invited me. And I went.

I'd a lot rather have gone by myself. I'd have given a year's salary as a wireless operator on Louie's yacht to have fifteen minutes alone with that young lady ashore, in which to inform her that Louie looked intelligent only because I'd taught him about half of what I know; that he wasn't a really tip-top, overgrown boy, but a half-witted boob; and that any money he displayed he had obtained by stealing from me enough to outfit a small gunboat and rob a Belgian relief ship.

But the motor tender was a lot the fastest thing that could get us across the shallows to that shore. So I got aboard it, and reflected glumly that the idiot hadn't sense enough to leave me ashore; that he just took it for granted that a real girl like that would never see my brains over his little pile of gold.

For most of the last half mile of that run I raised a faint hope that the tender would hit something that would rip half her bottom out. I could swim a good bit faster, if not quite so far as Louie.

I kept up the hope until we were less than a hundred yards from shore, and could have talked to the girl if she hadn't been holding her finger to her lips in a fashion that would have enforced silence on a class of boys at a baseball game. Then I reversed my hopes so suddenly that it jarred my whole system.

We had hit something!

Tom Healy, at the engine, reversed it as suddenly as I had reversed my hoping apparatus. Nor he, nor Billy Nock, at the wheel, nor Louie, nor I had ever seen a mine of any kind before. But we knew we were seeing one now.

As I look back on it, it wasn't a very big mine. But if the whole world ever looks as big to me as that mine did just then, I'm afraid I'll get worldly.

For some reason it didn't go off that time. But Healy was so scared he forgot to shift the clutch ahead again until we were backing up, and then the clutch

bound and the engine stalled. And Billy Nock was so rattled he forgot to steer backward, so that we just set stern-foremost for that round head of steel.

Back—back—at that steel can of sudden and unpremeditated death! The girl gave a shriek of terror that made my startled stomach-pit sink a mile or so. It completely drove from my head the plan I had suddenly formed and was rising to execute—a dive over the opposite side. It made Healey's hand slip from the crank and dropped him full length in the forward cockpit.

I never shall know what it did to Billy Nock. For I was watching with fascinated horror the movements of Louie, who was leaping over the stern deck and sticking his foot out to push the mine and us apart before we made another more violent bump than the bare shave we had accomplished the first time.

It might be the height of presence of mind; it might be just a little the worst thing in the world to do. Louie didn't know, I didn't know, nobody knew. We just waited and waited, and—

Boom!

As I toppled off the cockpit seat I saw Louie drop overboard. That is all I can account for. And then, just before I passed away, there came another boom—a trifle muffled, so that it didn't sound much too large for the general blow-up of creation.

I don't really believe I fainted or lost consciousness. My first impression tended to confirm the old adage that marriages are made in heaven. For there, right before my eyes, stood the wonderful girl, though we had never even been introduced to each other on earth.

But my next sense was one of doubt about the heaven part of it. My head had hit and was still resting on a corner of the hot exhaust muffler, and there was nothing suggestive of heaven about that, or in the remark I heard Louis sputtering in the water outside the boat.

I could not imagine any one in heaven exclaiming:

"Huh! Well, I'll be damned!"

Since he was going right on pretty vociferously, making himself the noisiest center for the moment, I got up, and began to rub the scorched back of my head preparatory to stepping over to the side where he clung. Then I didn't step. I stood still and stared.

It wasn't our little mine that had blown up at all. The lesser bang had evidently issued from a gun on the deck of a very businesslike little patrol launch, which was now proceeding deviously but with evident intent of reaching Louie's yacht. A blurry puff of blue smoke hung lazily about a hundred yards behind the launch's present position.

But about a quarter of a mile seaward from our small ship was a bank of yellow smoke that made a perfect cloud of itself. It was a mine blown up out there to hint to the captain of the yacht that it might be safer to lie still and have a talk than to attempt any swift getaway.

Apparently the little tender had escaped observation thus far, and the owner of the yacht was supposed to be aboard. I figure that the heavy fog which had broken but fifteen minutes before our arrival at the island had enabled us to get in unobserved, especially since we had arrived on that side of the island where there was no sign of life.

The only explanation I have ever thought up for our getting through the nice network of mines as we did is because Louie's yacht was one of those extreme shallow-draft affairs which really had no business venturing quite so far at sea at all, and couldn't have hit a mine that couldn't have been in plain view of a lookout on a real steamer.

However it had happened, there we were, and there was the yacht between the terrifically evident mines and the perfectly obvious and leisurely self-assured patrol boat. Also, there was the girl!

She recurred to my mind when Louie, now only knee-deep in the water, stopped his profane sputterings and turned to her. As he spoke I, too, looked at her. She

was half hysterical over all that had happened.

It takes quite a girl to look beautiful and half hysterical at the same time. But that girl was doing it perfectly. I permitted myself, under protection of Louie's query, to gain a complete survey of her attractions.

Surely those dainty hands and feet were French or Spanish or something romantic; though the blondness of her hair and skin proclaimed that she must have come from the northern part of any of the Latin countries, she had dark-brown eyes.

I was thinking very fast. If she were only French or even Spanish—it would be all off for Louie. Heaven grant that she be not German. For Louie could get away with whatever dialect his sausage-making father had brought over with him. But Louie was trying her in plain English.

"Pardon me; but could you possibly tell me what it all means?"

I fairly ached for a "*je ne le comprends pas*," or "*No entiendo io*." But that fairy vision spoke Queen George's English—she spoke it fluently, not to say gaseously, and in perfect, up-to-the-minute Fifth Avenue style—above a Hundred and Tenth Street.

I quote. I cannot bear even yet to comment:

"You bet your gran'ma's crayon portrait I can tell you what it's all about. It's about a year's residence on this coal dump for you; though there ain't no particular good reason for hopin' it won't be six years. If you two tender babes had had the sense between you to take the cue I was tryin' to hand you, you might 'a' made a getaway with that pretty little toy ship of yourn. But now—you might just as well let me pinch the bunch of yez, instead of waitin' for the guard to wake up and poke you around the beach with a bayonet. You c'n come quiet and peaceable, please, and the baron will listen to any other particular questions that's on yer minds."

We started, peaceable and quiet. She turned to Tom Healy and Billy Nock.

"You c'n come along, too," she invited. And they came, too.

It wasn't much over half a mile to the end of the coal-heap, along a well-beaten path at its base. Then we turned along the inner side of what now showed itself to be almost a ring, with a snug little harbor in the middle.

Louie had told me he was going into the harbor, if the island proved worth looking over. We were going into it all right.

And here were buildings—long, low shacks of the most temporary construction, also some of the heavy concrete walls that are known as the protectors of ordnance by any one who has ever been to Fort Wadsworth. Warped to a dock in the middle of this little harbor lay a long, black ship, which just about filled the capacity of the place. It certainly would have been squeezing to put two such ships in there at once.

Louie gave me one gasping look. I handed it back to him. We both knew.

We had stumbled upon the hidden coal-lying station of that mysterious raider that had been making the newspapers interesting when we had last seen any we could read at Porto Rico. And that grim monster into which, just then, men were carrying, almost at a run, huge bags of the soft, black coal piled to the height of a small hill all over the island—that was the raider herself.

Before we had gone another fifteen feet a young-looking officer ran down the hill to meet us. The girl brought us to a halt.

"Here, Rudy, are four of the men off that yacht out there," she introduced us. "They got off in a little gas-boat before Captain Heiny seen 'em, I reckon. Anyhow, they landed down at the other end."

"Gott!" Rudy exclaimed. "And you bring dem guys up here all by yourself already. Say, Mamie, you could take it from me, you'll get one iron cross from der kaiser yet."

Mamie laughed disdainfully.

"Not, I reckon, f'r bringin' up them

boobs. They come like they was little lambs what I was leadin' to pasture. Gee! You'd ought to seen 'em. They got mixed up pretty close with one o' them little bombs along the shore just about the time the Friedrich fired a shot and you let go the mine the other side of the yacht. This soaked guy went clean overboard. The other toppled into the cockpit an' lay still with the muffler singein' his hair and neck. And these two make-believe sailors just laid down to die anywhere the layin' was good and handy."

Rudy had turned now and started back with us toward the row of shacks nestling in the hollow of the great crescent of soft coal. He bade the girl follow. Meanwhile I was making an inventory of Rudy.

All told, he looked good to me, and he sounded better. His broken English was not the sort a German learns in school, but the kind one picks up in a stay of a few years right around New York City, U. S. A. Apparently that same idea of the young officer had occurred to Hartmann.

"Say, Herr Offizier," he spoke, in that utterly nonchalant manner which is the similitude of his entire attitude toward everything, "would you mind giving us some sort of steer as to what they're going to do to us for accidentally stumbling on this delightful little island of yours?"

"I don't know," Herr Offizier Rudy replied quite seriously. "It would make a whole lot of difference for why you want to come to our delightful little island. You'll get plenty of chance to explain that to *dem Herrn Capitan*. Whether he believes you might be something else again, see?"

"But—but—" Louie began.

"Anyhow, I ain't supposed to talk with you fellows. But, say—" his voice dropped—"you don't neither of you happen to come from Newark, do you?"

"Why, my father's sausage factory is out on the meadows," hastily responded Hartmann.

"You don't happen to know anybody by name of Shiffen on Sixth Street, num-

ber a hundred and one? I got one sister, named Hilda, what boards there when I come away. Her and Mamie, here, ain't never got along good—you know how girls is. So Mamie don't know nothin' about whether Hilda's still there, or alive or dead yet."

Louie apologized for his utter ignorance of Newark beyond his father's factories, save as to the main streets by which motorists get through and out of that town. His regret sounded pretty genuine.

"It must be devilish hard," he mourned, "to be cut off from your relatives like this."

I could have understood his regret if Louie weren't half as sympathetic a big kid as he is. I was regretting a lot myself, and was guessing whether it would be safe to assure our keeper that I knew his sister Hilda perfectly.

The trouble would be that, if he asked any questions about Newark, I'd be caught bluffing. I don't remember ever seeing even a picture post-card of Newark.

Anyhow, I didn't have time to take the chance. In another moment we had been ushered into the august presence of Herr Lieutenant Baron von Hilberstein, a pink-cheeked, blue-eyed, golden-haired youth of a trifle over twenty, who stood up to greet us, looking as if he was afraid to death of us.

It was not of us, however, that he was afraid. It was of his own almost faultlessly though much too carefully pronounced English.

"I trust, gentlemen," he said, when he had managed some form of general introduction, "you will understand our inquisitiveness from the fact that the usefulness of our station here depends entirely upon our enemies' ignorance of its existence.

"You will also appreciate that it is difficult for us to understand why you should have brought your yacht here from so pleasant a resort as San Juan; oh, yes, we have been the ones inquiring your position every few hours under different

wireless names. We even tried to head you off two days ago by a storm warning you did not choose to heed. We tried again this morning, but could not get you.

"Now, we see that you have passed forty or fifty more attractive islands without giving them a look. You choose this of all others. You will not mind explaining why, I hope."

If worse came to worst I could have explained the only reason I had ever come. My desire to be anywhere on that island had begun when I had caught sight of that pretty girl who had turned out very disappointing thus far. It might be an unpleasant thing to explain in the presence of the young lady herself; but it wasn't pleasant having that pink boy looking at us as if he thought we were dangerous while he had it in his power to order us blindfolded and shot.

I had come because Louie had brought me thus far. But Louie—

"Well," Louie faltered, something raising within him a creepy sensation that what he had to say didn't sound much like sense, "you see, this island is down on the chart as uninhabited. Nobody seemed to know much of anything about it except that it was on the chart. I—I got the notion it might be interesting to explore—er—explore the place up a little, don't you know? I—"

He broke off, growing red in the face. Exploring an island as small as that, and already perfectly indicated on the charts—it did sound weak.

"I see," our inquisitor broke in. "Some such curiosity, I take it, as animated His Excellency, Ex-President Roosevelt, to discover the River of Doubt," this with the merest trace of a smile under the fuzzy mustache.

Louie and I both laughed nervously.

"Oh, I—I just took the notion—whim, I guess you might call it." Hartmann's boyish nonchalance was all but going to pieces.

"I see—I see." The young officer spoke as if in a hurry to let it go at that. He was wonderfully businesslike, con-

sidering his apparent age. "And, no doubt, it was a similar whim which led you to come in close behind our mine-field, under cover of a fog, at the top of the tide. Also, seeing you had no idea about the place, except that it was uninhabited, beyond what the charts show, it was certainly not reason, but whim pure and simple which caused you to anchor your vessel outside, when the charts indicated a safe harbor as the only possible advantage of the spot."

Louie threw up his hands. He grinned amiably at the girl.

"Murder will out," he cried, flushing. "I hope this young lady will forgive me. You"—he turned again toward her—"will have to admit that he's driving me to it.

"The captain got a little mixed, dead-reckoning in the fog, and we thought we were going down to the front door of your harbor all right," he went on. "In fact, we thought we were over a mile beyond it and making a wide circuit to get the end of the channel as the chart shows. If the fog had waited another ten minutes to lift, I imagine we'd have come very near trying to climb your coal mound, for we thought we had half a mile more to the turn.

"The first look I got at the shore gave me the notion that I didn't want to land at all, and I was on the point of giving the order to back out and start for something more interesting, when I happened to see the lady here. The island was not uninhabited. I credit all of you with taste enough to understand that such a sample citizen of any land would tempt one to take the shortest cut to some acquaintance with it."

It might have broken the tension entirely—but its effect did not reach that. The boyish lieutenant blushed a shade deeper while he smiled, as if he would rebuke himself for levity in so serious a moment.

Only Rudy seemed to laugh wholeheartedly, as if we had somehow tickled his personal vanity. Of course Louie and

I emitted a sort of choked spasm of a chuckle, which was more or less hysterical.

But the girl thus flattered or honored as she might choose—looked highly indignant, and spoke:

"The nerve of him! Say, I'd just like to ask you"—and she turned on Louie—"if them glasses of yours was so good you could see all these bewitchin' charms hanging onto me, if I didn't hand you as many signs to beat it as a person could hand out who didn't know the deaf-and-dumb for 'scat'—Gawd knows I didn't aim to act invitin'."

"You certainly didn't," Louie admitted. "But your actions failed to outweigh your good looks."

"Freshie!" she uttered in deep scorn, and stuck out her tongue at Hartmann in dead earnest.

Whereupon the pink-faced lieutenant cleared his throat for action again.

"This is hardly a time for jesting," he asserted with that deep solemnity one has to use, if he isn't going to give up being solemn altogether and laugh. "While I shall not take any hasty action, there being plenty of time, so far as I can see, for full consideration of details, and consultation with the superior officers of such vessels as are supplied here—it must be quite patent to both of you that a much more rational hypothesis to account for your presence than the highly whimsical one you have given, would be to the effect that you represent your government in having entertained some suspicion of this island and in attempting to satisfy that suspicion under guise of an innocent yachting cruise—"

"Representing my government!" gasped Louie. "Why, my dear—er—lieutenant—that is preposterous. That yacht of mine is absolutely private property. I'm no more a member of the United States army or navy than you are. I—"

"Ah," coldly rejoined the lieutenant, his mild blue eyes growing sharp and hard—"perhaps there has been a mistake.

Perhaps it is another Louisa II and another Mr. Louis Hartmann who owns the yacht listed as a member of the United States Power Squadron of New York, which was Number Ninety-Six in the practise maneuvers held in New York Bay last September!"

There are times when one can get through more thinking in thirty seconds than he could accomplish in thirty ordinary hours of close application.

My first thought caused me to give one startled glance at Louie. I was afraid he'd blow up and say things unbecoming a quasi-naval officer made prisoner by a German Herr Baron.

If there's one thing calculated to get Louie started, it's the United States Power Squadron. He was enthusiastically in that effort to give amateur owners of pleasure vessels the proud feeling that they were practically commanders in the U. S. N.

He was in it at the start. He had stayed in it up to this extremely parlous moment.

Most of the members of the U. S. P. S. are ready any minute to swear that they were asked to form their association by the authorities of the navy. There isn't any question that they formed it. They trained themselves like anything. Those of them who were rich enough got new boats that looked as warlike as a deck-cleared battleship. And then—the navy didn't take them on.

It was a great disappointment. It was worse. It was an outrage. It was an unspeakable act of ingratitude to the high minded patriots who had spent themselves and their hard-inherited gold.

The thought that, after all Uncle Sam's unappreciative, ungrateful failure to recognize his pet society, he should be here, actually accused of acting as a spy, in danger of being summarily shot for being a spy—this thought was enough to get Louie started. It did, then and there.

Louie forgot the lady. He forgot his own danger. He forgot everything but the raw deal suffered by the United States Power Squadron at the hands of the

United States navy. He surely taught that pink-cheeked lieutenant a lot of English not to be got out of any books published while Anthony Comstock was alive, or even since.

Oh, it was lucky for Louie that, in peace times, you can't commit treason against the United States government with your mouth. Even at that, I don't know as he could have got away with some of the stuff he put across except in a very close circle of friends.

And, although the kaiser and Woodrow Wilson were just then weeping on each other's necks in warlike and peaceful peace notes, it wasn't right to give the impression that our navy, could be chased out of the sea by a properly manned and managed fleet of model sail-boats.

Louie did that—as I'd heard him do it before; and he went on to pay his respects to all the other departments of the government in a fashion to have made the king of Siam wonder if it weren't his duty to humanity to take us in order to provide us with a government, if not quite cultured, at least endowed with a faintly human intelligence.

If that pink-faced baron wirelessly half of Louie's remarks to Wilhelm II, it's no wonder the imperial government decided that no ruthless submarining could be so insane as getting mixed up in peace efforts with the half-witted, brain-softened, senile-decayed defective Louie painted for Uncle Sam.

It's no wonder the baron softened toward us. He probably thought it would be a shame to waste bullets on the deadliest possible spies from a hostile chicken-run.

"Is that true, Herr Corporal?" he asked of Rudy.

"About this here Power Squadron," Rudy responded, "I ain't never heard nothing in America. I wasn't there long enough yet to be buyin' me hundred-thousand-dollar yachts to play navy games with."

But by the time he had said this, the American girl had got from the corner of

the little room to which she had receded. She had planted herself squarely in front of Louie. Her cheeks were blazing and her brown eyes had turned the color of good anthracite.

"Do you know anything about it, Vetterchen?" Von Hilberstein asked her.

"About what?" she asked, with the crackle of fire in a pine board.

"About this Power Squadron?"

"Power Squadron," she repeated hotly. "No, cousin mine—I never heard a darn thing about it till right now. But I can guess a lot more'n I've heard. If this here boob's a specimen of this Power Squadron outfit, I can guess he's got the wrong steer about why it ain't recognized by the United States navy. I can guess a lot better reason than he's give. It's because the United States navy ain't so hard up for hospital ships as to be takin' floatin' bug-houses already loaded with loonatics even at a gift. It's because the U. S. A's little navy ain't and never was no asylum for feebs, even though they might have the dough to buy their own floatin' nurseries and hire their own nurses.

"An', while I'm talkin', Herr Cousin Lieutenant Baron Heiny von Hilberstein, I'm goin' to tell you these here ain't no spies. The United States ain't got no such system of spies as you Dutchmen, to be sendin' suspicious reports about what the cop of Squeedunk Crossin' ate for his dinner, mebbe—but the United States, when she needs a spy, c'n afford the few cents extra to get one what could tell a arsenal from his own big mouth."

Then she flashed her eyes back at Louie Hartmann. They were already brimming with angry tears.

"You—you an American!" she cried scornfully. "Oh—you big boob!—you big—boob! You—you big—big—"

She broke off, sobbing hysterically to the exclusion of articulation, and dashed from the shack. And I knew a lot more about that little girl than I'd dreamed of, either when I'd heard her sadly unclassic English or when I'd first looked upon her

absurdly pretty face and thought her the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

Of course she was German—German enough to be the cousin of this pink-cheeked baron, the sister of Corporal Rudy, as I guessed that evening when I heard the baron call Rudy "Vetter," too, and Louie told me that meant cousin—German enough to be here with her kin, however in the world she had got here, lending all the energy and courage she had to them in a forlorn island likely at any moment to be turned into a hell of deadly danger.

But she was American, too. I could guess that this was not the first time she had given Uncle Sam the support of her highly colloquial eloquence.

No doubt the whole station teased her. A lot of good-natured and bitterly lonely soldiers or sailors would be sure to tease as pretty a girl as she was. But I imagined they had not teased her about America after the first week of her stay among them, whenever that had been.

I forgave her her bad English. Although I had never counted my own patriotism anything to brag about, it struck me that a heart as loyal as hers could be plenty of excuse for overlooking the fact that the tongue tied to it talked the slang and grammar of shops and cheap tenements. The man that won that loyal little heart would be well paid for the labor it might cost him to train the tongue to higher speech—would be rich in possessing it even if his labor utterly failed.

Was I willing to be the man for the labor or the failure even? Well—I forgot all about our parlous position in figuring that she liked Americans better than Germans, and that, of the two real male Americans present, the other one had shattered his chances with the girl beyond all hope of repair.

While I was doing this reflecting the others were talking—mostly in German. It appeared that our position was rapidly getting over the worst of its parlousness. At all events, the Herr Lieutenant was leading us out to a shady spot under what

was left of a pair of palms for afternoon coffee and cigarettes.

As we stepped from the shack the Louisa II was being towed very carefully into the tiny harbor. The baron stopped for an appraising and approving glance.

"I say, Herr Baron," Louie spoke up in a manner that indicated the effectiveness of his normal buoyancy; "is there any good reason why we shouldn't remain prisoners aboard my yacht?"

"I was on the point of making that suggestion myself, Mr. Hartmann," the lieutenant responded warmly. "We really haven't any spare room for prisoners on shore here."

"And, may I ask if there's anything in the code to forbid me the pleasure of inviting our captor and his company aboard this evening for a little dinner in honor—in honor of—" Louie broke off falteringly.

"*Des Kaisers?*" prompted the captor.

"Oh, I say," Hartmann appealed to him, "you wouldn't ask that of me yet, would you? You know, I told you I'm all against you in sentiments about this war."

"What then?"

Louie's honesty had almost put the skids under his painfully built-up safety and near-friendship with the man who held us prisoners of war. The baron's tone had turned stiff and sharp again.

"Well, I'd like to make it a dinner in honor of your pretty cousin, and by way of a public apology from one American for insulting the navy of the best little American ever. Wouldn't that go?"

Baron von Hilberstein's face relaxed. He glanced toward the shining smile on the face of his subordinate cousin Rudy.

"I guess we could stand for that," he decided. "Eh, Rudy? The way the food's been lately I could almost dine in honor of any of the Allies except England."

It was after the coffee, as we were being escorted by Rudy back to our own yacht, now very securely tied to the side of the long pier at the end of which the

raider still yawned for more and more bags of black, dirty coal—that Louie told me the outcome of the confab in the shack.

"He won't let us go," mourned Hartmann. "He wouldn't take my oath or my word as a gentleman, or my check for half a million, as security for our keeping our mouths shut about this black hole. He said the secret was too important to trust with any one. We're here—here, Harry—until the island's discovered by the British or the end of the infernal war."

"Well—" I couldn't help it if my tone lacked the mournfulness of his. It might take time to win the affections of the lovely, stormy little adopted American—"Well, the man next me at the table was just telling me all this stuff about Germany's being at the end of her rope is bosh. He says the Central Powers can keep up the fight for ten years."

Louie looked as if he wanted to bite me.

"I thought you called yourself a pacifist!" he snapped. "I always knew that was just another alias for a damned pro-German. You sound as if the idea of ten years more war tickled you."

Well—if it should take me that long—maybe it did.

II.

IF ex-Warden Osborne ever wants to get some rudimentary points on the real way to make a prison the sort of place for which an old offender will long with pangs of homesickness, I'm the man to give any points the criminal's friend may have overlooked. I think that next week had almost got Louie resigned to our gloomy prospect.

Certainly our captors spared no pains to make us feel at home. They dined with us that night, and they lunched with us next day, and they accepted another invitation to another dinner in the evening.

They sang lively songs to console us for our loneliness, and grew happy over our being consoled until they sang the

mournful songs that showed they were really overjoyed themselves.

By the third night it looked as if the festivities were at an end. They had eaten us out of provisions. But, on the fourth day they gave us generously of their own meager stock in pay and seemed to love us as well as they had while we were playing the hosts.

And that night the raider, which had sailed away before dawn of the day after our arrival, came in with all hands singing. It seemed that the three previous trips had been lean ones in the matter of securing food supplies. The ships they had caught had been inward bound, near the end of their trips and of their provisions.

This time fortune was kindlier. Two passenger ships had been bagged within an hour of leaving South American ports, their buffets perfectly intact. Also there had been no difficulty in quickly landing the passengers, before they had time to raise appetites after the scare of being captured. The raider was fairly fat with food, and the stock of two first-class and one second-class bars.

The genial captain had not had time to acquaint himself with our existence the day we came; but he now sent us over an invitation to dine with the officers of his vessel and the lieutenant in charge of the island station. Of course this affair started off a lot stiffer than our previous dinners had, inasmuch as the invited included none of the low-ranked men of either ship or shore.

But it soon warmed up. The captain made us the guests of honor, seating us at either side of his own plate.

The first toast proposed was a long and painstakingly pronounced eulogy of the President of the United States. I answered it with a pæan of praise for the kaiser, which was so warm they voted to drink it in schnapps instead of champagne. To the toast "America," Louie managed to reply with one "to the German people," and was sane enough to refrain from any hints that he thought he

could tell them a better way to govern themselves than they had.

Followed toasts and more toasts. Then they grew less formal and got to telling us delicious yarns of their raids—yarns that would have made a fortune for a story-writer. They may have been all true or part true, or mostly pure fiction—but they were all good.

Then they grew still less formal. Somebody got the piano going, and they all sang. Somebody else started a phonograph and—well, it was “good night” then. The partizans of the machine-made music didn’t even bother to line up opposite those who held to the piano. Each chose his song and did his best with it until it happened to go softer than the other, when he would shift to the one he could hear better. And Louie and I made our getaway as gracefully as our legs would let us.

Meanwhile they decided that the Louisa II’s cold storage plant was the place to keep the best of the food to be left for the shore guard. The next morning it was crammed beyond possibility of shutting its doors. We were bidden to help ourselves. After the raider’s departure our deck became the mess-room for the officers of the station.

Another three days brought the lucky raider home again with another load of provisions. There was another night of high yet decent revel. Without raising any idea that all Germany’s war-prisoners were treated alike, I was becoming quite convinced that, so far as we were concerned, enduring prison life was going to be mostly a question to be solved by the capacity of our stomachs to stand up under the strain of some two and a half banquets a day.

Joy-prison—it was that with the joy raised to the n th power and the prison part lowered to the irreducible minimum. It was that for just one week—and then it wasn’t that at all.

For that week I think I was the one to catch the n th power, and that multiplied by several times what the rest were get-

ting out of it. For I wasn’t enjoying just food and drink and good stories and songs and boisterous stag dances. I was enjoying the society of the girl!

Because Corporal Rudy could get along pretty well in English; because, maybe, he was the lieutenant’s cousin and in line for a little favoritism; but still more, as I figured it out, because his presence provided chaperonage to afford his sister a little change from a scene that must be driving her to the verge of dementia, to the comforts and the society of the brighter world aboard our yacht—Corporal Rudy was put at the head of the half dozen marines assigned to keep our prison tied to the dock. And he and the girl spent practically the whole of each day aboard with us.

And I had the girl to myself. She refused to warm up to the man who had blackened her country’s navy before the officers of the navy of another country. And, since Rudy and Louie seemed to hit it off together beautifully, it required little engineering to keep the four of us paired off exactly to my liking and almost to the satisfaction of my heart’s desire.

Heart’s desire!—well, there wasn’t any doubt in my mind about my heart’s desire before the second day’s sun had set. I forgave her East Side English—forgot it. Not until the end of the week did I discover the flattering fact that she was using my own style of conversation as a model wherewith to reform her own, and had already begun, in her more careful moments, to improve on several characteristics of the model.

She was a wonder, that little girl. None, I reflected, but a wonder in cleverness and versatility could have so thoroughly Americanized herself in the brief time Rudy’s English indicated for their American residence.

None, I was quite sure, but a wonder could have got me in the depths of love to which I had fallen in all but no time. I had every two-year-old college-alumnus’s conviction that I was no susceptible boy.

None but a wonder, I was forced to admit by the end of the fourth day, could have kept me from a proposal of spontaneous combustion, not to say explosion. I knew I wasn't keeping that proposal down. It was just some look in her face or quick twist in her ready wit which always saved me and made me choke back the earnest love talk with a feeling that I'd have to do it or give up the happiness of any talk at all with her.

There were moments when it looked to me as if she knew she was the life and animation of this sordid, wretched coal-dump, the only influence that was saving the station from being emptied of men by a series of murders and suicides. Then I guessed that she also perceived that she was losing her punch for her job; that she must find some diversion or start the train of self-slaughter herself.

I recalled that she had snapped up Rudy unmercifully over some trifle the first morning they had come aboard. It looked to me as if she recalled similar instances and decided that, if she couldn't get on with her own brother any more, she wouldn't be able to help the others much longer—that it was time for her to get some diversion.

At such moments I was dead sure she would have much preferred that I had been a girl; but was doing her desperate best for herself and the others with what I was.

But I was so completely, fatuously in love with her that I was ready to stand for it. I was her slave for life. I'm not sure I'd have been able to keep away from her, had she entertained the barracks with nightly imitations of my converse of the day. In the darkest of these dark moments of belief that she was making a toy of me, I was still ready to declare myself a dividend of happiness in the thought that to-morrow would be another day like to-day.

Joy-prison—I don't think I'll ever be so happy again in this world. I'm not sure that I'd willingly realize again that I was utterly, foolishly made with the sort

of insane love that doesn't care how foolishly insane it is.

But it was happiness while it lasted—it was happiness for a week. And then—

If you can imagine Dr. Jekyll delivering a nice little lecture to his church's Dorcas society, and suddenly breaking off to regale them with one of Mr. Hyde's most richly vulgar tales, you can form some notion of the way the joy went out of things aboard our yacht and that island.

It was noon—dinner hour—and we were lunching the raider's officers in return for the second feast in which we helped them celebrate the capture of two or more well-provisioned ships. We were all roaring at a story of the captain's when the wireless operator of the island station stepped up to Lieutenant von Hilberstein, saluted, and handed over a message.

Von Hilberstein read it with a smile of satisfaction growing broader with each word. It was as if only the presence of his superior prevented him from turning loose a whoop of joy.

He handed it to the gray-haired captain. The captain read it—read it again as if it were too good to believe. And he did not try to prevent himself from shouting a bull-throated "Hurrah!"

The clamor for more definite information was instant. Even as I voiced my own eager "What is it, Herr Captain?" I felt a wave of hope that at last the Kaiser's definite peace-terms had been published.

"It is," cried the captain—and there was instant silence at the resonance of his voice—"it is that at last our real foe is to be reached. It is that our last and sure weapon is to be wielded. It is that England is to get a taste of that emptiness she has inflicted on our helpless women and children. It is that the soft palaver is over about rules that England has been permitted to change at her own sweet will.

"It is the answer to our enemies' scorn for our benevolent offers of peace. It is

the end of the war. It is victory—*victory*—at last made certain for the Fatherland—victory over a whole world full of enemies.

"Come, *meine Jugenden!* Quick—wine, schnapps, beer—anything. We drink to our Wilhelm—our kaiser—*Hoch!—Hoch!—Hoch!* At last he has signed the order and published it to the world, for the beginning and prosecution to the bitter end of the war of the U-boat!"

The glasses had been filled with whatever drink each could reach handiest, were raised even as he spoke the last words, were clinking joyously to punctuate the end of his fiery speech.

Then suddenly the lips that had parted to receive the glasses, fell wider open in a gasp of amaze. Above the clinking and the rising murmur of satisfaction broke the voice of the girl, shrill, harsh, fierce to the verge of fury, vulgar unquestionably in its wrathful loyalty to a land that was not the home of the U-boat or theirs.

"May your kaiser's soul burn in hell for it!"

Down on the mahogany deck a dainty glass monographed with the yacht's name, shattered into a thousand pieces and splashed water over the feet of the officers. They stared at her a moment in blank amaze. Many a face—and the captain's was among them—paled with rage at the unexpected insult to the high representative of all their mighty pride.

And she answered them stare for stare, defiant, her lips parted with panted breathing, her fair cheeks afire, her hair in the sunlight a dash of flame, her eyes lambent coals.

But no man capable of being the captain of that raider could have remained angry with wrath so pretty as hers. The captain let himself down with a little chuckle.

Perhaps he remembered an inestimable service she had already rendered to his cause. The others followed his example and laughed as he remarked good-humoredly enough:

"Our little lady doesn't like the U-boats."

She waited an instant, trying to get breath for more of the sort of tirade of which she was a master. Then she wheeled and went swiftly to the gangplank, to the pier, toward the shore.

"*Ach, Vetterchen,*" the baron called over the rail, "don't go away mad."

He must have learned that from Rudy. She paused just long enough to bid her higher-bred cousin go whither she had just consigned his emperor.

But by this time all of them had awakened to the fact that their hosts were more Americans. They had looked at us and discerned that our glasses were still full. There was an awkward silence which some of them tried to cover by drinking the toast.

The lunch was begun again. Our captor-guests were even more punctiliously considerate in every word and gesture than they had been before. They plied us very gently with queries as to the attitude of our country. They assured us very earnestly that their rulers had no wish to offend America. They declined to believe that the United States could longer fail to perceive the justice of their cause and their action.

But the free and easy good-fellowship was gone. We were glad when the raider again put forth to sea. Their politeness had been at such tension it was a relief to give over the effort to match it.

Our storage plant was still the refrigerator for the station officers' mess. Even these meals lost their spontaneity. Rudy and Mamie spent the two following days aboard the yacht as usual.

But Rudy had gone stolidly silent. He no longer discussed with Louie his ambitious plans for the day when he would get back to America.

As for Mamie, it seemed as if her very beauty were fading by the hour. She tried to make conversation, tried to listen to mine—again and again she tried and failed. At length she frankly gave up. I thought again I understood.

Her job was done. In the very best conceivable fashion she had been mothering that brood of big, lonely, generally gloom-enshrouded marines. Now they were weaned from her—and she was weaned from them. From the beginning she had strenuously asserted that her love for the fatherland was second to her love for her adopted land.

It was at noon of the third day after we had learned of the new U-boat campaign when we heard of Washington's consequent action in severing relations. The baron sent the word by the messenger who had carried it to him from the wireless station. With it he sent a brief note of command to Rudy. There was also a curt note to Louie, which was sufficient to show us that we were now prisoners indeed of a nation unfriendly.

"Humph!" Rudy exclaimed at reading his order. "So I cannot be your keeper any more. *Was ist los?*"

"I guess this is," Louie answered, turning over the copy of the radiogram.

Rudy and I read it together.

"Humph!" Rudy grunted again, his rather heavy features taking on a troubled expression. "No—" he added reflectively, dejectedly—"I like that not. It is—it is bad."

"Well," Louie snapped—"I like *this* not. One would think that esteemed cousin of yours took it as a personal insult that his government has driven mine to break off relations."

Again Rudy and I read together. Mamie had crowded up and we parted our heads to let her see between us.

MR. LOUIS E. HARTMANN,
U. S. P. S. YACHT, LOUISA II.
SIR:

I regret that business and circumstances will prevent my lunching aboard your vessel to-day. May I trouble you to permit my men to get from aboard the portion of the victuals which I and my officers would have eaten. At my earliest possible convenience I shall arrange for the transfer of the supplies from your storage plant that there may be no unnecessary occasion for friction between my soldiers and your crew.

I trust that you will suffer no incon-

venience in remaining strictly aboard your vessel pending further arrangements. In doing so, you will assist me in protecting your persons and property from any possible difficulties. Awaiting any different instructions from my superiors, I shall, of course, take all possible means to leave you unmolested in your present quarters, and to afford you the fullest protection at my command.

With best wishes for your comfort and well-being, I beg to sign myself, esteemed sir, most respectfully yours,

HENRY VON HILBERSTEIN, LIEUT.

It was Rudy who first pronounced upon this document. No doubt he understood better than we the difference between an essentially official communication and the possibilities of personal intercourse. But—

"He still plays that United States Power Squadron note," was Rudy's criticism. "I don't like that neither."

Before we could quite grasp the significance of his words, he turned.

"Well, it comes my relief. I must say '*Auf-Wiedersehn.*' Come, Mamie. We go by the electric tower again."

His friendly blue eyes blinked as he turned to the gang-plank. Once on the pier, he croaked a couple of commands. His six men came stiffly together.

Six other men, headed by an officer in uniform similar to Rudy's, marched out from the always busy shore end of the pier. They paused, saluted and were saluted. Rudy and his men marched sternly shoreward.

The new six took up their places which divided the length of the yacht into tiny beats. Neither of us recalled having seen before either the new corporal or any of his little guard.

The men who came shortly after with trays on which to carry off the lunch for the officers might as well have saved their scrupulous care to leave a plenty for ourselves. Louie and I were in no mood for eating. We were in no humor for talking.

We had nothing to talk about. Everybody in America had long since taken for granted that the breaking of diplomatic relations would be almost instantly followed by hostilities. Neither of us could

conceive any idea as to what might be our condition or our fate as prisoners of war. At least, the ideas we did conceive were so unpleasant and gloomy we could not hear ourselves utter them.

Prisoners of war we were. Neither of us gave himself the mad pleasure of dreaming of escape. It had been Rudy's first task to put our electric equipment out of commission. Without it we could not get an explosion from one cylinder of the powerful engines, one turn of a propeller.

Our problems were all beyond our power to figure even on solutions. As to whether this renewed mention of the power squadron was to pave the way toward treating us as out-and-out spies from a nation already making hidden plans for warlike action—as to whether such treatment would involve merely a continuation of a slightly closer confinement than we now endured, whether it would mean incarceration in dingy coops ashore while the yacht went to join the German fleet, whether it would mean just backing up to a wall and facing a dozen rifles—we could only guess. And the guessing was nothing nice to be talking about.

About three o'clock we had more visitors. The lieutenant himself led them aboard the vessel. The stiff formality of his morning's note was now reflected in his rigid bearing. He curtly informed us that his men were come for the supplies. Our steward conducted him to the storage box.

But supplies were not all he had come for. There had been sufficient evidence of a hasty search of our vessel having taken place while it was being towed from its outside anchorage to the pier in the harbor. But the search which now proceeded under the personal eye of the baron was thorough enough to have satisfied a story-book detective.

Not a bag or trunk or chest or draver escaped. Not a scrap of paper was left unexamined. And not a scrap was left aboard the vessel. Even our light vaca-

tion literature was removed from the walls of the saloon and borne ashore.

All the captain's instruments were taken; the papers of clearance from Porto Rico and elsewhere; the logs of all the voyages the *Louisa II* had made since her launching in the spring.

Our main compass was removed from the stand on the bridge, together with the binnacle lights. Our sailing lamps were confiscated. The oars of our tenders were tossed to the pier. Even the marlin-spikes were taken from our masts, and any other deck tools which might possibly become weapons in any sort of free fight.

No doubt the baron was acting within his rights. Our coming held at least ground for a shadow of suspicion. Our escape could hardly mean anything else but the destruction of his post, and that was of vast value to his government.

But it is hard to see such things calmly while they are being done to you, especially when the doer has made himself almost an intimate chum. Even though there were occasional indications that our captor's stiffness toward us was a pose, that hardly softened the acts which accompanied the posing.

The baron's men were working to remove the entire wireless equipment when we were bidden to go below for a search of our persons. When that had been accomplished clear to our skins, we were allowed to dress again and return to the deck.

A glance about revealed what might have been the deck of a comfortable house-boat on which to loaf away a summer at a cheap resort. It seemed to have been swept clear of almost everything that could suggest a real sea-going vessel.

Most of the men were gone, the ones who had just searched us disappeared up the gangway. The baron himself remained for a last word.

"I hope we'll be able to restore all these things to you again some day," he said softly, in his careful English. "We are not really intending to confiscate them permanently."

That hardly melted our hearts or took the rebellion from our faces. Von Hilberstein's lips quivered a little, and his eyes blinked as he held out his hand toward Louie, who happened to be nearer him than I was.

"I'm so sorry," he uttered a trifle thickly. "I'm afraid I haven't even made you understand that this wasn't a pleasant duty."

We gave him our hands. Somehow we felt better to have him go that way. But a more cheering sight than his somewhat relaxed back was the appearance of his pretty cousin at the end of the gangplank as he was about at the top of it. The baron undertook to bar the way.

"Look here, Vetterchen, you can't go aboard there any more," he said sternly.

"Who said so?" she returned impudently.

"Why—I did," he tried to reply with dignity.

"Well, just stand there a second and I'll show you you're talking from a wrong steer," she told him. "I not only can go aboard that yacht, but I'm going."

"But, Vetterchen," he argued, "I can't have my discipline overridden completely like this. I'd hate to have to punish you in any way, but—"

"You bet your grandma's daguerreotype you'd hate to. I'd make you hate it worse'n a fight with a buzz-saw. And, look here, my sweet Cousin Heiney! You said yourself, a lot o' times, I've saved this whole outfit from windin' up in a series of Dutch acts. Any time you want to see that little serial show start, just try buttin' your discipline into my goin's and comin's. You get that?"

He seemed to get it. He let her pass. The pert grin had faded from her face, and most of the color, as she got to the deck. I had to forego the idea that she was coming especially to console me. She addressed herself to Louie.

Aboard, she hurried us across the deck, and then made sure none was near enough to listen to what she had to say.

"Look here, you," she snapped into

Louie's face — "me and Rudy want to know if there's sand enough in you an' Harry here to take a long chance."

"Chance?" Louie repeated slowly. "On what?"

"A chance on beatin' it out of here to-night. Me and him has been doin' some figurin' up there in the tower. An' we've got the dope out that it's one in a hundred now, mebbe; but it won't be one in a thousand after to-night.

"That power squadron thing has got Heiney, and it 'll get some of the others harder than him. Besides, to-morrow they'll be a double guard put on here, which won't help none. So—make up them minds of yourn without stoppin' for bastin's. Are you game, or ain't you?"

"But the engines won't go. Our elec—"

"I got all you need for your electricity hid in my clothes right now. An' I got some pills that 'll put them guards asleep if they can be got to take a drink apiece. An' Rudy's handlin' the buttons on the mine-field. It 'll mean a couple o' shots from the battery, mebbe; but Rudy says it 'll be a devil of a job to hit you when you get goin' at the speed you got.

"It's a chance—a lot o' chance of your bein' able to get over the anchored mines. But it's a heap better chance than you're likely to get again. Are you on, or ain't you?"

"We're on," both of us whispered, and added a quaking—"I guess."

"It's no guessin' about it," she warned again. "You got to go through it—or go to hell, I reckon."

"We're on," we decided more firmly.

"Then show me a stateroom where I can get some of the plugs and switches out of my dainty apparel. An' get your crew lined up somewhere below, so's we won't lose no time on the instructions stuff. The tide's at eleven to-night. It's then or never for youse."

As we left her at the top of a companionway that would take her straight to the door of our spare stateroom, Louie and I looked up into each other's face,

I am free to admit that the swiftness with which the girl had fairly shoved us into this situation left me breathless, dazed. I held out my hand to Louie.

"Good-by!" I croaked weakly.

"Good-by?" he echoed in a gasp.

"What do you mean? Are you going to back out?"

"No, of course not. I'm going with you right to the end. But—there might not be another chance to bid each other good-by, you know. You've been a devilish good fellow to me, Louie. And—"

"Good Lord! If that's the way you feel about it—we'd better—better—"

He broke off. There wasn't anything better, no matter how I felt about it.

It was war. Over nearly half the world millions of men were in some such position as ours at that moment, unable to guess their fates, unable to alter their fates, their only choice between nearly certain, immediate, but honorable death before, and utterly certain, but little delayed and dishonorable death behind.

I never was so totally, panickily pacifist in my life. Louie and I had blundered into this infernal situation. That a man should deliberately walk into a recruiting station and sign himself up for just such situations as this—was the crowning example of human capacity for doing the idiotic.

Thank Heaven we had little time for further reflection. I've too vivid an imagination to figure up any more manners of death for myself than the one it is set down for me eventually to encounter. Louie had gone down the other companionway, and I had followed dumbly.

We had the six members of our crew ready when Mamie came into the narrow quarters with a bundle of small brasses and steels. The engineer seized them.

"Be getting them into place while I talk," she commanded. "Make sure they're all there. And just remember it's hotter than this where you'll be if one of them guards outside hears any tinkering."

For once an engineer managed to use wrenches and screw-drivers without in-

terfering with the conversation. Meanwhile the girl shot her brief instructions. Mostly they summed up in one phrase—a preparedness that could find and do everything in the dark.

It seemed as if the real work was going to be all up to the crew. What Louie and I had to do was to get back up on deck, sit and chat with the girl long enough to make it appear that our time spent below had not excited us enough to signify anything suspiciously interesting afoot. The crew had to arrange the hold and make every adjustment possible without an actual trial of the motors.

This must be done under cover of getting supper. And then it was up to them to get on such terms with the guard that would come on duty at eight o'clock that the offer of a few drinks would be acceptable.

Theirs the hard part? Not if you ask me. It was all very well while the girl kept up a perfect phonographic performance of mirthful quip and loud laughter. But when she left about half past four, with another hour of daylight left—well, the next time I'm fixing to take my life and spin it on the end of one finger, I'll let the crew come up and look perfectly natural, while I go down and sweat around the engine. And then to eat a dinner—please spare the tale.

At length the crew came up and made its way to the little after-deck. With them they carried clinking bottles and heavy glasses. The night guard had come on a half-hour before.

Suddenly I realized that here was the weakness of our plan—or the weakest of all its weaknesses. Successfully to drug seven men so that they will all drop to sleep at once, or nearly enough so to prevent any one of them becoming alarmed at his companions' condition—I wished the girl would come down to help us do it.

I wished it the more, as time went on. Hope grew when a chorus of voices up at headquarters sent strident chords out into the sticky air. They must be trying to console themselves, I thought, for losing

us. But their singing would have its psychological effect on the seven men who, cheerless themselves, though with good cheer within arm's reach, must know their superiors were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Our men took it out in loud laughter, in requests for "schnapps" or beer in a tone that could not fail to reach the audience above. But it was an unconscionably long time before we saw one of our guardians step to the edge of the pier to look down on their mirth.

Tom Healey tried to make something of this slender opportunity.

"Hello, up there!" he called good-humoredly. "*Wollen trinken?*"

It was probably the limit of his German. I had learned enough in the past week to catch the drift of the sour response:

"Not with the enemies of my fatherland."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Louie in my ear. "That settles it. He's put the bug in their ears. Once give a Dutchman the idea that eating his dinner is disloyal to something he ought to be loyal to—and he'll starve to death. I reckon I know. My father—"

"But, great Heaven! What are we going to do now? It's after nine. We've got to be moving at ten-thirty or miss the top of the tide. We can't jump up there and expect to get away with a silent fight that will knock out as many of them as there are of us.

"Oh, what a fool I was not to see this! Surely Rudy never worked out this part of the deal. That girl must have been reading nickel libraries all her life. Dope seven men all at once! Well—this settles us."

It was my turn to try to encourage, though I must say I couldn't just locate the cheer stuff to use for the job.

"If she planned this, you can bet your last dollar she will see it through," I prophesied in as nearly as possible a tone of belief in what I could not help realizing was not so.

And then, as if I had brought it about by speaking it, the girl was there. My heart almost stopped as I heard her clear voice answering the challenge of the corporal.

"Oh, I thought you boys would be lonesome so far away from the fun. Anyhow, I don't feel up to batting with those bunches to-night. Who are you all here anyhow? Hello, Hans—Hello, Gus—why, Karl! Did they stick you down here with them Americans, too?"

I could catch her German words between those she spoke in English. Her tone was one to make a man forget any but the most important duties to his fatherland or his own father.

"What you got to drink?" she asked, when they had all got within easy hearing of her voice. "What—coffee? *Nichts besser als das? Ach—Gott in Himmel!* I want a real drink. Hey, you Americans! Hand us up something wet before you all get so *gebummelt* you don't know your bottles from your glasses.

"Beer? Say, you've got some swell notions of prison life down there, ain't you? Give us some wine. Give us some of that bitter wine off the Italian ship. I liked that. Bet none of you ever tasted it. Just imagine it's wops' blood, and it 'll go down good. Hey—goin' to get that wine, or ain't you? We'll come down and take it, if you say so."

Charley Prince, our steward, nearly toppled down the companionway to the galley, calling back to know if there were clean glasses on deck—just as we had instructed should be done, in order that the glasses should be the ones we held in readiness.

He hurried back with an armload of bottles. Tom Healey came up with a tray. We handed him seven mugs that tinkled as we tried to hold them.

"And here's one wine-glass for the lady," Louie mentioned genially, as he added it to the trayful of mugs, each moist at the bottom with the water it had taken to soften a chloral tablet.

Charley waited on them with the grace

of a Broadway head-waiter. Then came the suspense.

"The U-boat—*Hoch!*" the girl cried with an apparent fervor to surpass their own enthusiasm for their pet engines of destruction. "*Hoch!*" she urged—"und *trink aus!*"

For some of them had hesitated as they tasted the strange wine with its stranger drug. Her final command was all but compelling. Those who hesitated were lost. But there was one—Louie pointed to him and whispered in my ear: "He hasn't touched his mug."

The glass stood full on a pile-head. That fact, with all its possible train of fatal dangers, had hardly dawned upon my fresh-frighted brain when the girl also saw.

"What's the matter with you, Otto? Don't you like the U-boat? Why don't you drink? Maybe you don't like the kaiser yet?" she flung at him in a voice that seemed almost dangerously accusing.

"I drink not the wine of my fatherland's enemies," grunted the stern throat of the man.

"It's the one with the bug!" Louie whispered. "We'll never do anything with him. She's wasting her breath," he finished impatiently, as she continued to urge.

"Aw, come on, Otto. You'll drink anything with me. I didn't think you'd turn me down like that. Boys, fill up again. Otto's going to drink to an American girl if he won't drink to America."

She filled her own tiny glass. She got up from the heavy timber that formed a low bulkhead over the end of the pier and approached the stolid upholder of the last jot of a principle. She lifted his glass from the spile's cap. She held it toward him.

"You're going to drink to me, Otto," she insisted. "Here, I'll hold it for you. If you don't drink I'll never speak to you again."

He backed a little away from her. I could guess how foolish she was making him feel. He was old enough to be her

father. She followed him and he backed farther, grunting disgusted protests at her of the nuisance she was making of herself.

"*Zurück! Zurück!*" he kept growling; but he was the one who was going backward.

For an instant I let my eyes wander from the pair. Already the strong dose of narcotic was taking its effect. One of the men had tottered. Another, bending over him and trying to speak, gave up and sprawled across him. A third pressed his heavy palms to his forehead and kneeled over. A fourth—

How long was it going to take Otto to perceive this? I swung my gaze. He was still dancing clumsily backward from the girl.

Suddenly I caught her purpose. Louie and the men in the little afterdeck had caught it already, and were standing ready to catch him.

He reached the edge of the pier. Without waiting to see if he would discover his danger or go and plunge off himself, the girl raised the heavy mug of vermouth and thrust it, wine and all, into his very eyes.

The waiting crew hardly let his boots clatter against the railing as they seized him. Billy Nock, not always too ready of mind, was ready now with a bandanna handkerchief for our guard's mouth.

"Quick, now—get their guns—cut the ropes—quick!"

The girl's voice was a weak whisper as she held herself together to remind us of the need of haste. Louie and I both jumped to the pier with two of the others. The girl's trembling fingers snatched two of the guns from the limp hands that held them. But we were at the ropes with carving-knives we had specially whetted for our dinner roast.

In split seconds we were getting back aboard. I felt as if I had served through a war already. The hum of the starter's gears came muffled from the engine-room. I wanted to lie down and faint after the strain. But I realized we were just at the beginning point.

I looked about and discerned that Louie was but half-way down the gang-plank, and that Mamie really had fainted. I sprang to his assistance to get her aboard.

"Was she going with us?" I gasped.

"She'll have to, now," Louie spoke in a tone bordering on despair.

But he left me to get the exhausted girl to a long seat where she could lie down; and turned to help the men who were shoving off the gang-plank. They left it dangling down the side of the pier.

The work of bringing the girl back to consciousness kept my mind for a moment off the terrible thunder of battle that would wait but seconds until we were discovered. A leap to the low after-deck procured me a bottle of whisky, and I had it to her lips before the engines had backed us off the pier's end and we were starting with a reckless jerk full speed ahead.

The touch of burning liquor on her lips brought her to. With a frightened glance about her, she sat up, still panting weakly.

"Rudy—where's Rudy?" she gasped.

"Why, Mamie—you fainted, and we couldn't leave you on the pier, and—"

"Oh, that's all right. I'm going with you. But Rudy—where are we?"

"We're only about a hundred yards off the pier as yet; but it's almost another hundred while I'm telling it. And—"

Once more I was interrupted. A shot rang out—a bullet whined above the rigging. I ducked involuntarily.

"Oh, this is all right," Mamie was saying cheerfully. "The fun hasn't started yet."

But it had by the time she was finished with the words. It seemed suddenly as if the whole harbor had become a crackling rifle-pit.

The lights of the pier were turned on full, as when the raider was being loaded at night. By now, however, we had got far enough away so that the arcs hardly helped the heavily clouded moonlight to reveal our white hull.

Hoarse shouts blended with the rifle-fire. To this was added the heavier boom

of a three-inch gun from one of the little concrete pits in the great coal-pile. That was answered doubly by a pair of its like on the opposite side of the harbor.

For an instant the startling terror of the thing had rendered me incapable of speech. Then the terror seemed to have died out. I couldn't believe that all this was being aimed at us.

I had been trying to ask the girl to let me help her below deck out of danger. Now, though the phosphorescent splashes darted up all around us, I couldn't see any danger. I felt as if Mamie would laugh at me if I suggested it.

Then the twang of a bullet from the rail within six inches of my hand served to put me into something like proper relation with the situation. I was no longer scared; I didn't seem to be afraid save for the girl.

"I'd better take you below," I shouted in her ears.

The wicked rattle of a machine-gun had joined the song of death.

"They may need me on the bridge," she answered.

But that she thoroughly understood the nature of our danger, she showed by climbing down from the settee instead of standing up. She crawled forward toward the raised section that overlooked the pilot-house, this last being in reality the main saloon.

We reached there just in time. A bullet flattened against the mast just behind this bridge, and still carried strength to knock the captain senseless over his wheel. It happened as we arrived.

"He's headed wrong anyhow," the girl cried to Louie. "There's rocks over yonder."

She snatched the wheel and began to help Louie turn it.

"Get him waked up again," she bade me. "We'll need him, unless one of you can steer by chart and compass."

"We'll need him," Louie put in. "We've neither chart nor compass left. This will be steering by the stars, and there aren't any stars to-night."

"Oh—why—but I had a compass," the girl exclaimed. "I—it's there yet," she laughed. "Not much of one—but it steered one boat down here."

She turned aside to fish it from her stocking.

"Is that the compass you had?" Louie asked, as she showed him an instrument a few sizes larger than a man's watch. "I'll give you two thousand dollars for that any day you want to sell."

The captain was restored as quickly as the girl had been. I stood wondering what about a compass could make Louie and the girl so oblivious to our danger as that he should offer twenty times its worth and she should refuse with death playing tag with us.

In righting our course we had run a little close to shore. Instantly another machine-gun began to spew its stream of lead along us.

For it had our range. From fore to aft and back again it swept at a height some two feet above the deck level. We first knew what effect it was taking from the sharp rattle on the steel bulwark Louie had put along the sides of the bridge for the naval maneuvers. An instant later there was a series of dull clinks that told of plate-glass cabin being punctured by bullets too swift to break them. Then the deadly stream was leading forward again—toward us.

It was fascinatingly horrible, an invisible knife that sawed its way toward us. Again the dull snapping of glass, a duller drubbing through mahogany, a straight line of lambent splatter in the water beyond while the drill of bullets found nothing to stop them forward of the cabin in the rear of the spacious deck. Then—

A quick stab of fire, as if a white-hot needle had darted through and out of the calf of my left leg, brought a startled yell of pain I hardly felt.

"Why the devil didn't you duck?" snarled Louie.

And I perceived that the others had flattened themselves against the false pilot-house behind the protection of the

short steel bulwark, while I had but stood and waited to be shot.

Don't tell me you can make a soldier over night. It takes training to know what is dangerous. The captain had some of that training, having managed to be in almost everything that happened in the Spanish-American war. Mamie had it, because she had been absorbing it from surroundings wholly military.

Louie had ducked properly—because the captain had pushed him where he belonged.

"I'm not hurt any," I answered easily. "Just nipped the skin on my leg."

But five minutes later I was taking surreptitious swallows from the flask to keep myself upstanding until we were beyond this rain of death.

And now we were reaching the mouth—I had almost said nipple of the harbor. A sharp turn made under the girl's direction had put a ridge of coal between us and the interior, which evidently had seen us plainly enough to know we were gone, since its firing ceased instantly.

"Here's where we catch the big fellows," the girl uttered calmly. "And dead ahead—it's straight out, now—is the grandfather of all the mines. I hardly think they'll waste that on us."

But it flashed upon me that they would be more apt to use everything they had on us than on an attacking vessel. For we were going away—and they believed we would send back an attacking fleet. Yet, in spite of that, it was the cannon for which I was waiting when the explosion came.

The tremendous cloud of flame was totally blinding. The yacht seemed to stop dead, as if it had run into a stone mountain. All four of us crashed against the pilot-house. We had bruises that would last us a long while, if all or any of us lasted with the bruises.

And the noise of the explosion. It was like nothing else I had ever heard. For I had heard all the other noises. Hearing could not compass this. We felt it. It shook every fiber of our bodies with a

shock quite distinct from that of our bump. Somehow it seized every nerve and bone and sinew.

It seemed as if the whole of life's energy had been blown out of me and left me standing. I hadn't strength to put the bottle of stimulant again to my lips. And Louie, the imperturbable—I could hear his teeth rattling together as if in a chill.

The captain, hardly yet completely recovered from the stunning he had got a few moments earlier, sat motionless where he had fallen. The girl's shaking hand was laid on my shoulder in her effort to rise. It lost its grip, and I had to catch her, with an effort that called for strength which had left me.

It could not have been more than a fraction of a second, but it seemed a deadly hour before the engines, recovering from the sudden load on the propellers, first in spasmodic coughs, then in more regular rhythm, at length in their normal purr—settled down to their heroic test of dependability.

"Is that the engines?" Louie gasped faintly. Then he added, "They won't run long. That did for us."

"I'm not so sure," argued the captain from a wider range of experience with the sensations of the sea.

"That was Rudy, and he missed us a purpose," the girl now whispered. "Give him a little light aft, and he'll miss us some more—if they don't chase him out of there too soon on account of that miss."

"God!" hoarsely ejaculated the captain, "I hope he misses us a little farther next time. Another shake up like that—"

The two six-inch guns on the opposite sides of the harbor's mouth spoke almost at once. It did seem as if the Louisa II was getting more than she had ever been built to take. Once more the whole craft shivered as a shell exploded directly over her stern. We forgot the scattering bits of steel in our efforts to cling fast to the railings and stanchions.

"The automatic pumps are starting,"

Louis Hartmann remarked a moment later. Since they would not run until there was water for them to take, their running now showed that the terrific shocks had opened seams. "We didn't need any ballast for getting over what's ahead."

Then it seemed as if we all settled into a sort of apathy that no longer cared what became of us. The next attempts of the larger guns to find our range were total failures. Somehow their very noise seemed to have weakened.

A second mine exploded a couple of hundred feet to the right of our course. I doubt if any of us batted a strained eye. We knew that we were drawing deeper than when we had first approached the island; we were making no attempt to dodge those mines we might set off by contact. There was no means by which we could have dodged them.

Two more of the mines under electric control from shore blew up. I doubt if one of us noted the relative positions of their explosions and our boat. We just waited to see which second would bring death—and waited more seconds, indifferent whether they brought death or no.

"Well," came from the captain's lips in a voice that rattled across cords half paralyzed, "we're a good ten miles off shore and out of the way of the mines. The patrol boat, you say, won't be back around before twelve. We'd better find out what we can as to what shape we're in for getting back to Key West. And the engineers ought to have a chance to give the machines the once-over before we start any racing again."

Not a word or sigh of relief from any one that our worst danger was over—just a reminder that our work might be momentarily changed to advantage. None of us felt any relief. We were just numb.

"Well," put in the girl, "we got to wait for Rudy and them now anyhow."

"Rudy?" Louie and I gasped together. "How do you mean?"

"You don't suppose I'd be here if he wasn't comin'?" she snorted.

"Coming? How?"

"The motor tender. It's been layin' in a little creek on the back of the island ever since you two fell ashore off it. Rudy and Willie and Adolf; they're all coming in it."

Louie and I looked at each other in surprise. Then we quit it. We didn't really care enough whether we took Rudy and Willie and Adolf or not to be surprised about it. Louie had made it a point to maintain a crew of United States citizens that there be no possibility of trouble or delay with any of the foreign war-vessels so generously sprinkled along our coast. Rudy and—the other two were Germans. An Allies' cruiser might make demands upon us for their surrender as war prisoners. We didn't care.

The engineers below decided that the engines were still ready to turn up their allotted number of revolutions per minute. One of the clutches was being tightened. The leaks were gaining just a trifle on the automatic pumps. But, barring heavy storms, we ought to keep afloat as we were, straight to New York, if we so desired.

We didn't. Key West would do us. But we didn't care where we went or how we got there.

And then we had to begin caring all over. From somewhere behind the island now quite invisible in the dark and half-mist—a long shaft of light stretched itself toward the west, lifted, described half a circle and dipped to the east, came back, dropped, vanished, flashed hither and yonder, and finally revealed its source in a white point of tense light now clear of the island.

"The patrol boat," Mamie whispered.

Then a sudden idea flashed into her brain and whirled her query upon Louie:

"How fast c'n that little tender o' yours travel?"

"About twelve miles an hour," Louie responded.

For an instant—we had turned on such lights as we needed now—she stared at Hartmann as if the thing he announced

were too monstrous to believe. Then she arose and swiftly crossed to where she got an unobstructed view of the performances of the patrol's search-light.

She dropped into a deck-chair there, so weakly that I was not sure she had not fainted. I set my numbed muscles into motion to follow her and give any aid I could.

When I could see her face, her whole figure seemed to have collapsed into a huddle of misery from which only the dark eyes emitted the slightest ray of life.

"If you'd just turn that light off—it shines in my eyes," she responded to my offer of help.

With the light turned out, she drew herself into a yet more shriveled and forlorn heap. She continued to stare fixedly at the ever shifting search-ray.

Huddled as she was, she looked cold. I hurried below and returned with a rug, which I adjusted over her shoulders. She made no effort to help or hinder me. But nevertheless performing the little act of protection warmed my love to the verge of flame.

An hour ago I had indeed revived her from a faint; but now I had time to be and to feel tender in what I did. It was a sentiment her tense spirit had given me no previous opportunity to indulge. It was the sentiment every man likes best to indulge toward the woman he loves.

I laid my hand over the tiny cold one she rested on the side of her chair while her shoulders and face hunched forward to watch for the beginnings of the next race for life.

"He has always the chance that he can come straight while the gunboat is dodging the mines," I broke the silence once to suggest.

"There are plenty of straight courses out from the island for that boat," she corrected dishearteningly.

And the race was more disheartening. The weather had cleared a little—enough so that we could discern the white hull of the little tender the instant the gun-boat's searchlight located it. The tender was

about four miles off shore then; the gun-boat quite close in.

But one could have figured the race from the start. The patrol had twice the speed of the tender.

That the three men in the tender made any run at all could but be accounted for by deliberate intention to be taken dead rather than alive. From the very bottom of my heart I wished that Rudy had been satisfied to fight on for his own country.

The tender was not much more than half-way to us when the forward two-inch guns of the patrol boat opened fire. That did not deter the men in the tender at all. They kept on with their flight.

We could see their silhouettes now, outlined in the broken reflections of the big lamp behind them. Two crouched low and close to the little engine; the third, forward, crouched over the wheel. I hated to try to imagine what their grim faces must look like.

The biggest of the patrol-boat's guns spoke again. A splinter shot upward from the stern of the tender and the three crouched lower. At the third round a plank was shivered for half its length.

But now the race was too nearly over for further flight. The desperate men in the tender, without diminishing speed, faced behind them and, guns to shoulders, began to pump bullets at the glaring lamp.

It was a clever stroke. The light vanished at the first feeble volley from the three guns. Though the white of the boat might be near enough for a target, the men themselves could no longer be seen by the pursuer.

Of boats or men we could see nothing at all. All the while our course had been almost athwart that of the oncoming craft. Now we had crossed their line and the captain's telegraph had buzzed the signal below for three-quarters speed ahead. For we must not get in range of the patrol's two-inchers.

Of all three boats, we must be the most visible, for we must make it possible for Rudy and his two companions to see us

so long as there was a chance of their reaching us.

A few moments more of waiting ensued. Then the guns of the patrol vessel spoke sharply. The flashes seemed turned a trifle to one side. In this last darkness the girl had got up and gone silently to the rail.

We glimpsed a pale light, apparently showing through the open door of the deck-house, and indicating that the patrol-boat had turned sharp in her course. While I was trying again to focus my eyes on the spot, the end came.

It was one more flare of horrible flame, one more detonation that tortured the ears. And in that flare both boats were plainly visible, their bows almost together and raised high into the air, their frames and sides seeming to collapse in shapeless masses. There were great, ugly howls of men in pain unspeakable—then silence.

I steadied the girl back into the seat, once more wrapped her in the big rug, then sat beside her. I laid my hand comfortingly upon the cold little one on her chair's arm. But this time she seemed conscious of the gesture, and drew her hand away and for a while sat staring at it uneasily. The captain touched my shoulder.

"Mr. Hartmann wants to speak to you," he announced almost gruffly.

He took my chair as I headed for the bridge.

"Well, what is it?" I asked dully.

"It's just this, Harry. I want you to let that poor girl alone—not to bother her with any more of your damned nice attentions—to keep out of her way, at all events, while she's aboard my yacht."

I was almost too astonished for words. When they came, my astonishment had turned mostly to anger.

"I don't know what you mean," I snapped. "I'm not aware of annoying any one with unwanted attentions. I could imagine something of what a blow—that—out there—was to her. I wanted to do anything I could for her."

"And what in the devil do you think

you can do for grief like hers?" came back from my old chum's lips. "You've got a wonderful respect for your imagination, it seems to me. I suppose you imagine you love her."

"It's none of your business if—"

"Say," he cut me off, "haven't you really ever heard of the way she came to be down here in the first place?"

"Why—why, no. I don't think she has told me," I confessed.

"Well, I'll tell you. Rudy and those other two—there were six of them at the start—got wind of the existence of this coaling station somewhere down here. All of them were reserve men, of course. They hadn't much money; but they had a whole lot of patriotism that wasn't getting the slightest exercise up in the United States.

"So they concocted the fool scheme to sail down the Keys from Florida in a rickety old cat-boat with a kicker in it. That wouldn't have been any worse than lots of other things, only Mamie wouldn't let Rudy come unless he'd bring her along; and he was still loony enough about the thing to bring her in order to get here himself.

"And even that might not have been so bad—in fact, we've been seeing it work out very nicely in the end. But something went wrong with the engine of the cat-boat just when there was a ten-day calm for which they'd been too low in funds to provide against with decent rations for the two days they'd figured for the run they were making.

"And—well, I'm not going to go into details right now; I haven't time. They got ashore finally. It was Rudy that managed to sail the boat into some sort of port. And two of the men were dead—three more and the girl were in a delirium of starvation. And the folks that got them out of their boat made a queer discovery.

"The girl still had plenty of food. She had it tucked in a little bag she carried on her lap. It was her food, too—her portion of the rations they doled them-

selves out when the bunch began to realize its plight. And somehow, by one lie one time and another lie another time, she had kept Rudy eating—something, enough to hold soul and body and brain together—right along. And he hadn't known that she'd gone without herself to accomplish it.

"Do you think you've got anything to console that sort of a love with? Don't you think there's a time somewhere when your cheap flirtations are a bit out of place?"

"Flirtations!" I echoed indignantly. After all, he had but added a cap-sheaf to my own estimate of the girl. "Maybe I'm something of an ass; but I've meant to marry that girl if anything could ever induce her to take me."

"Marry her!" Louie's jaw dropped. He stared at me in blank non-comprehension. "Well, maybe you could now. But—before now? Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, I don't know as I'd let you stop me. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't want to let our baron lieutenant chap back there take her away from me. And I don't see why her brother should seriously object to me if she didn't."

"Brother? Who?" Louie insisted crazily. "My God! You didn't think Rudy was her brother, did you?"

And, before my bewildered brain could even then grasp the truth it was borne in upon me in the tone of a woman's voice. It was a voice dead and hollow with long vigil and strain and anxiety, hoarse and weak and thin. The girl was at the rail again as she cried out—her fingers pointing toward something none of us could as yet see or hear.

"Rudy! Rudy!"

It was a voice to call a man back from the dead. And the cheerful-looking, rather over-enthusiastic and distinctly sensation-loving young man who was swimming toward the lights of our boat was her husband.

"Well," he spoke simply, as we got him aboard, "I guess now I got to fight for my new country."

Playing the Man



by Joseph Ivers Lawrence

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

DAVID TREVES returns to his home in New York after seven years devoted to his education in England. The period is 1775 and he is strongly Tory in his sympathies, so that when Dale Kirby declines to drink a toast to King George, there is trouble at once and a duel. But David discharges his pistol into the ground and thereby placates the friends of his cousin, Godfrey, with whom and the latter's wife, Caroline, he has taken up his residence. But on the arrival of a courier with news of the outburst of the Liberty men at Lexington there is such excitement in the New York colony that David decides to betake himself to the home of Nathaniel Winnington, a well-known Tory, whose daughter Jessica he has recently met and for whose safety he is troubled.

Things quiet down after a bit, and he returns to the Wall Street house, which however, in the course of the next year reverts to his cousin Godfrey when David declines to subscribe to the patriot's pledge put up to him by General Lee.

He is proscribed, and goes out into the suburbs to live with the Murrays at Inleberg, whither, after a skirmish, his patriot friend, Adrian Ingold, betakes himself for refuge. David insists on seeing the wounded man back to the Continental lines, and in doing so gets a safe-conduct pass from the British commander, Sir Henry Clinton. This, however, works to his undoing when next day he is captured by the Americans.

CHAPTER XIV.

WANTED—A MIRACLE.

AT Adrian Ingold's suggestion the scouting party conducted David to the American headquarters on Harlem Heights. The two horses of the fallen British troopers were caught, and Ingold mounted one and rode away down the valley to look for his own command.

The other horse was given to the prisoner, and as the battle on the heights was growing in violence and spreading toward the valley, the party headed for the opposite heights at a good pace.

On top of the rocky elevation north of the valley, known as Point of Rocks, David saw a group of mounted officers, one of them being particularly conspicuous by his superior height and by the milky whiteness of his charger.

"General Washington, I believe," said David casually, to the captain, who rode at his side.

"Ask me no questions, sir," was the answer, "an' I'll not have to offend you with ungracious replies."

David nodded understandingly, and kept silent for the rest of the ride. But he viewed with interest the hastily thrown

This story began in the March *Argosy*

up fortification on the successive elevations of the heights, and when his captors halted on a knoll to observe the valley they had quitted, he was permitted to look for himself.

Low-hanging smoke clouds now obscured the Hollow Way to a large extent, but bodies of troops were moving rapidly in huge patches of kaleidoscopic color, and it took but a moment to determine that the rebels were once again in retreat. The heavy firing ceased, little by little, and the smoke cleared, and presently a fanfare of British bugles rang out from the middle of the valley in a notably tuneful call.

"What's that they're sounding, captain?" asked one of the Virginians.

"Why, damn their insolence!" muttered the captain dejectedly, "it's no military call; it's the fox-hunter's call at the close of the hunt. They think they've bagged their foxes, but we'll show 'em yet!"

He scowled angrily as he saw a suspicion of a smile on David's face, and at his surly command the party turned about and continued the ride at a swinging trot.

As the captive had vaguely surmised, their destination was the Morris mansion, which was now the center of the rebel camp, with the beautiful lawns cluttered with light ordnance, supply wagons, and nondescript camp paraphernalia. They trotted into the yard, passed around the house to the large barns, and dismounted.

A guard officer came from the barns and received the Virginia captain's report. He was informed of the circumstances of the capture, and he read the pass that was evidently so incriminating, and ordered a soldier to conduct the prisoner to an improvised cell in the large barn.

The cell was a room some ten feet square, which had evidently been used as a small granary. There was a keg in one corner for the prisoner to sit on, and before he had been there many minutes a soldier came in and placed a jug of water on the floor. Then David was left to his peculiar reflections for several hours.

They were not pleasant, nor yet notably melancholy, for he could hardly take the situation as gravely serious.

If he had to spend a long time in such a prison he would sorely miss his luxurious quarters at Inleberg, but he felt that his incarceration could not extend over many days. The true and soft-hearted Adrian would get him out by hook or crook before he was subjected to any positive hardship, and the chances seemed strong that his friend would not permit him to pass a single night in such a place.

He heard many sounds of excursions and alarms outside the barn. Bodies of horse and foot passed along the road, and after one burst of shouting and trumpet calls he made out that horses were hastily attached to the light artillery pieces in the yard and driven away at a great pace.

About noon, as he figured the time, a continuous and awe-inspiring din was borne across the hills. The rattle of musketry became a steady tattoo, and was punctuated by jarring salvos of artillery fire. He listened with eager interest, but as the apparently considerable engagement continued without abatement, he became vaguely anxious.

It seemed highly probable that the rebels would be annihilated or put to rout, and he scarcely relished the idea of being rescued by men of his own political sympathies at a time when he might find explanations difficult. If the cavalry patrol that had pursued him returned to headquarters and described him accurately, he might fare worse among his friends than with the enemy.

For an hour or more the battle thunder rolled without intermission; then it fluctuated, growing fainter in the distance, or louder with probable shifting of positions. At last it subsided gradually and ceased.

He heard men cheering near the barn, and galloping horsemen shrieked out tidings of victory as they approached. It was incredible, the listener thought, yet it seemed to be true.

Then came another fanfare of trumpets, somewhere on the heights, and fresh bursts

of cheering. The rebels were replying in kind to the British taunts of the morning; the buglers were sounding the victorious call of the fox chase.

After an hour of bustle and hilarious confusion about the place, he heard horses entering the yard, and the name of Washington was roared out by a hundred hoarse voices. David sat down on his keg and shook his head in puzzled bewilderment. It was too preposterous for belief, but of a certainty there had been a great battle, and it seemed that General Washington had won the day.

A soldier came into the cell as darkness fell and put down a piece of bread and a jug of fresh water.

"I have heard sounds of great rejoicing," David said to him quietly. "Did your troops succeed very brilliantly to-day?"

The soldier grinned, but leered at the prisoner with a contemptuous air.

"The king's men will not stop running this fortnight, I'm thinking," he said. "Certain it is, they won't come this way soon again."

David was eager for more detailed information, but the man turned about abruptly and left him alone again.

The bread was dry, but David was hungry and he ate it all, washed down with hearty drafts of the cool water. It grew dark, and he had no light. He was cramped from sitting so long on the keg, and when it seemed that he was to have no bed or blanket, he took off his full-skirted coat, spread it on the dusty floor, and stretched himself wearily upon it.

A little later came a more considerate visitor. It was the captain who had taken him prisoner, and he brought a small candle-lantern, a coarse blanket, and a porringer of stewed beans.

"Here, Mr. Treves," he said, not unkindly, "I'm commander of the guard for the night, and I've no wish that my prisoners should suffer. You can be a bit thankful to his excellency, too, for he's in high good humor over the victory and

he's given orders that all prisoners shall be treated kindly—even spies!"

"I shall try to prove to your satisfaction that I'm far from being the latter, captain," returned the prisoner.

The officer smiled, but shook his head.

"I wish you luck, sir," he said, "but I'd not be in your shoes for anything I can think on. You'll appear before the court martial to-morrow, I believe, and the—the execution of the sentence is usually carried out the same day."

"Come, you're rather gloomy for a night visitor!" David exclaimed, half facetiously. "I should dislike to think that to-morrow would end for me before sunset. I can't think that I'm such a desperate enemy to your cause."

"The one little paper that I found on you convicts you, sir," said the officer soberly. "I don't see what could save you, short of a blessed miracle."

To his surprise, David almost smiled. He was thinking of the faithful Adrian as a "blessed miracle," and his mind was not disturbed by misgivings or by the gloomy predictions of his jailer.

"Come, come, captain," said David, "don't let my plight cast a gloom over you. I'm an optimist by nature, and I shall not give up hope until I feel the noose. As a loyal subject of King George I really should be most dejected over the ill fortune to his arms to-day. Believe me, I can't comprehend it! I thought that Sir William had struck at last with an army that could do no less than overwhelm you."

The captain's eyes sparkled in the lantern-light.

"It 'll take more than mere numbers to overwhelm us, Mr. Treves," he said. "They crowed too early in the day, and they paid dearly for it. The heights around Bloomingdale are littered with red-coats to-night—poor fellows that'll never fight again. We fought 'em for two hours running, hand to hand, sir, in a buckwheat field just above the Hudson River bank,* and then we chased 'em! They're

back in the city to-night, and they won't come out again, to-morrow nor the next day.

"It wasn't a cheap victory for us, though," he continued, more soberly. "We lost some fine fellows, although our losses were mere nothing compared to theirs. Some of our officers say that we might not have won the fight, had it not been for the rare work of Colonel Knowlton, of the Connecticut Rangers, and—poor fellow!—he fell in the second assault. Major Leitch, of our Virginia fellows, went to reinforce him, and he fell at the same time. But their men went on fighting, and—God be thanked!—we got the victory."

"It's a terrible business!" declared David solemnly.

"Ah, you may well say so!" returned the captain. "Blood and murder, in a land that ought to be blooming in peace and plenty!—and all for that pig-headed dolt that wears the British crown! Do you mind that officer that we saved from the redcoat cavalymen this morning—just before we captured you, sir?"

"Very well, indeed," answered David coolly.

"He was from my own colony of Virginia—Major Ingold—as true a man as ever I knew," went on the officer, "and he fell, sir, in that accursed buckwheat field, leading his men against the British bayonets."

There was an instant of tense silence. The candle in the lantern guttered and almost flickered out. The officer heard something like a stifled sob.

"Is anything the matter with you, Mr. Treves?" inquired the captain, squinting curiously through the half light.

There was no answer, and the officer leaned closer to his prisoner.

"Egad!" he exclaimed, "I've quite unnerved you, sir! But, I vow, your emotion does you credit. I suppose these things sound more terrible to a civilian gentleman than they do to us that are in the beastly business. Death is around us all the time, and it comes quick to us.

Well, sir, I'll leave you. I wish our acquaintance might have been pleasanter; I can see that you're a man with a heart."

David heard the door close, and the key click in the lock, and then he clasped his hands convulsively to his head and threw himself upon the blanket at full length.

"My poor, poor Adrian!" he groaned, in an agony of grief. "Poor lad! that you had to be one of the first to go!"

And then, suddenly, he caught his breath in a gasp, and sat up. With more of amazement than horror, he realized his own predicament. He was in a fair way to be sentenced to death on the morrow, and there was not one man who could prove that he entered the rebel lines to serve a rebel officer.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FOEMAN'S WAY.

AT noon next day David Treves stood in the big court-martial room of General Washington's headquarters—it had been Mrs. Morris's famous drawing-room—and heard the president of the court declare that he stood convicted as a British spy.

"Your deportment before this board has been that of a gallant gentleman, sir," the officer observed, "and my profound sympathy goes out to you. It is not our wish to appear vindictive or brutally severe, and, as you may have friends with whom you would communicate, I would not deprive you of sufficient time to do so. It is the sentence of this court, sir, that three days hence, at sunrise, you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

The pallor of death was on David's face, but he uttered no sound; his shoulders remained square to the front, and his head retained its courageous poise.

"If the prisoner has anything to say," spoke up one of the officers of the board, "let him speak now."

David's chest heaved as he took a deep breath, and he moistened his lips.

"With your indulgence, gentlemen," he began slowly, in a low voice, "I would ask a—a very great favor—a favor that may well be too great for you to grant. My only hope lies in certain things that I might say to one man—and that man is General Washington."

"If you hope to win clemency, sir, by giving up certain information with regard to the enemy," said one of the officers gravely, "such a proposal should be made to this court—not to General Washington!"

"You misjudge me, sir!" David replied, in a firmer tone. "I am not one to barter honor for life in such a manner. It was my pleasure to meet his excellency on a certain occasion, and what I would say to him, now, is a private matter, between one gentleman and another. I could say it only to General Washington."

The president of the court shook his head almost sorrowfully.

"Such requests are not uncommon, Mr. Treves," he said, "and I fear that it would be difficult for you to gain the desired audience with the commander-in-chief. However, I shall include your request in my report, and, if possible, I will see that it comes to the notice of his excellency."

He nodded to the officer at the door as he finished speaking, and the prisoner was led quickly from the room and conducted to his cell in the barn, where he sat down on his blanket and remained for a long time in a state of dumb stupefaction.

Hours passed, and he thought with constantly increasing agony of Jessica and of the few good friends who would sincerely mourn his untimely and undeserved death. And his grief for the death of his friend did not cease.

He and Adrian Ingold had known each other but a few months more than a year, yet their friendship had been of rare quality, surviving even those vital differences of thought and action which commonly serve to break the most fraternal bonds.

In his extremity of anguish and emotion he permitted himself even to wonder if

Adrian's ideals had been more just and true than his. For himself, he was loyal to the crown because his fathers had been so before him—but Adrian's ancestry had been no less loyal!

He had lived in rare old England and been educated in British ideas and spirit—but so had Adrian! He believed the colonies to be indubitably the possessions and dependencies of Britain, as essentially British as the British Isles—but Adrian had been an older man and a wiser man, and Adrian had seen the future of America all bright and glorious in the liberty and independence of a self-governed nation.

The slender ray of sunlight that penetrated the tiny hole that served as a window near the top of the cell, now lay horizontally in the dust-laden air, and the sufferer thought dully that the afternoon was waning. Then, as the beam of light grew more golden, a soldier came and unlocked the door.

"Come out, prisoner," he commanded. "I've orders to take you before his excellency, General Washington. Make haste!"

David sprang up, with a cry of hope and relief.

"Never fear, my friend," he said; "'haste' is too slow a word for me at such a moment!"

He was unshaven, his hair lacked powder, and his good black coat was creased and dusty, but he entered the Morris mansion again with the spring and vigor of new hope in his step and carriage.

The house was full of officers, and despatch bearers were darting in and out, but General Washington was found sitting alone in the large room on the left of the entrance.

"You will wait outside the door, which you may close," said the commander-in-chief to the soldier, as they entered, and then he bowed gravely to David, without rising, and waved him courteously to a chair.

"I regret that our second meeting is so inauspicious, Mr. Treves," said the rebel

leader quietly, and with a deep note of sincerity in his voice. "I readily recalled you, from your name: you were a friend of the gallant Major Ingold, whose death added so greatly to our loss in yesterday's engagement with the enemy."

David bowed sorrowfully, scarcely trusting himself to speak.

"You will understand, sir," said Washington, "that almost every man convicted of espionage is inclined to regard his case as exceptional, and that he almost invariably craves the privilege of laying his plea before the highest authority. If I were to yield to every petition of the sort, my time would suffer an appreciable curtailment. I may say, however, that in deference to the memory of Major Ingold, I have made this exception in your case. You will oblige me by being as brief as possible, Mr. Treves."

"If the interview avails me nothing, your excellency," said David fervently, "I shall leave your presence happier for this mark of your consideration. I will be very brief, sir. I could not tell my story to other men without the danger of compromising certain innocent persons, but I feel that it is safe in your hands."

He then told hurriedly, in terse sentences, how Adrian Ingold had been sheltered by those distinguished Tories, the Murrays; how he had been prepared for his perilous journey to the rebel lines, and how, finally, he himself had gone forth with him to afford support and guidance. Without pause and with a convincing earnestness, he told the story to the end, then fell grimly silent.

General Washington eyed him with earnest intensity throughout the recital. At the end he bowed his head and was thoughtful for some minutes.

"The most important phases of your experience, Mr. Treves," he said suddenly, but kindly, "are those which followed your departure from the house of Mr. Murray. Major Ingold, unhappily, is no longer with us. General Sir Henry Clinton might, an he would, bear testimony to the incident of the pass—which seems

to have been somewhat irregular. But could any one vouch for your movements from the time you left the British outpost to the moment of your arrest?"

David shook his head. "Major Ingold and I were alone, sir, until the final pursuit and skirmish," he said.

Washington sighed audibly.

"The most unpleasant thing we have to experience, in the exercise of high authority, Mr. Treves," he said, "is the official hardening of the heart. Our own impulses, our own best inclinations, have to be thrust aside with a ruthless hand."

David bowed silently and got up.

"I beg your excellency to believe," he said, "that I am not lacking in gratitude for the attention and consideration that you have shown me."

"Mr. Treves," said Washington, with deep feeling, "as between man and man, I believe every word that you have spoken. As General Washington I can believe nothing until I have seen, the conclusive proof. I hope, however, that I may lighten your heart a little before you return to your place of confinement. I shall give orders, sir, postponing the execution of the court's sentence to one week from this day, and I shall privately make some investigation of your case, if I find that such an investigation is possible."

David stepped to the door and bowed again solemnly.

"Your excellency knows me to be a king's man," he said huskily, "but I would like to say, sir, that if it comes to pass that I must give up my life, I shall die with no feeling of bitterness toward the commander of the army for which my good friend gave his life."

"I am grateful to you for that assurance, sir," returned Washington, a little hoarsely. "It is my prayer, Mr. Treves, that the Lord of Mercies will deal gently with you."

David opened the door and passed out quietly, but with a heart full of high emotion. The soldier-guardian grasped his arm and led him rapidly back to the barn and into his cell.

The sunlight had now quite departed, and dusk was gathering, but the place was in some way less gruesome, less grim, in its squalor, than it had been before.

CHAPTER XVI.

MONDAY NIGHT.

FRIDAY came, three days after the sitting of the court martial, without further incident, beyond the dull routine of the improvised prison. Late in the morning David heard a coach rumble into the yard, and an hour later the guard opened the door of the cell, and Jessica Winnington and her father came in.

David uttered a great cry and clasped the girl in his arms, and she sobbed convulsively with her head on his breast while Nathaniel Winnington choked and strove manfully to find his voice.

"Verily, David," said the old man huskily at last, "we never thought to see our land under such a reign of terror!"

David shook his head vaguely, but could not speak. He caressed the soft golden hair of his betrothed and held her close to him.

"Oh, David!" she cried at last. "We must save you, my dear! We *shall* save you! This—this General Washington, as he calls himself, sent a message to us through the lines, by the gracious courtesy of Sir Henry Clinton, and we were permitted to come here to plead for you. David! I have been on my knees to the man! I have told him, in this last hour, how noble you are, how brave and honorable, yet he knows not, even now, if he may release you. The monster!"

"He was kindly and courteous," observed the temperate Mr. Winnington.

"Though he condemns me himself," said David, "I shall still believe him a gallant gentleman."

"Would you both drive me mad?" wailed Jessica. "The man's not gallant! If he were he'd not doubt a lady's word, and you'd now be in the coach with us, going home again, David."

"Poor Adrian!" exclaimed David abruptly. "You have heard—"

"Ah, yes," she cried, breaking forth in sobs again; "it's but one woe upon another!"

"It is the way of war," remarked the old man. "I mourn our poor friend, and I deplore his unfortunate, misguided course."

"David, we may remain with you but an hour," sobbed the girl. "Will you pass the time in talking of men's politics? We shall not be permitted to see you again, but to-night we go to Sir William Howe's headquarters in the city. He shall save you! He shall tell this General Washington what it means to— to torture one of the king's loyal subjects. This is not the Spanish Inquisition!"

"My dearest," exclaimed David, "I beg of you, do not go to Sir William Howe! It seems that he's not in a position at present to dictate to his enemy, and you'll surely compromise yourselves and our good friends, the Murrays. Think! If it were known that you so much as sheltered a rebel officer, thereby aiding him to escape through the lines, your estates might be confiscated; you might even be thrown into prison. Mr. Winnington, you have too much discretion to permit such folly!"

"Father will do as I say," declared Jessica firmly. "Shall a lady sacrifice her future husband merely to save confusion—to save a paltry house and garden?"

"Leave it in my hands, my lad," said Winnington. "Poor Jessica is quite beside herself—and no wonder! I believe that Mr. Murray will accompany me to call upon Sir William, and we shall speak to him discreetly. We may say that you strolled through the lines in the indulgence of a whim. Sir William is a genial gentleman, and I'm sure he will make representations to this Mr. Washington, and possibly arrange to exchange you for some rebel prisoner now held within our lines."

They talked on until the end of the

hour, and the sentinel at the door then asked the visitors to withdraw. But he was forced to repeat the request three times. Jessica screamed in awful anguish at the first summons, and at the last she swooned in her lover's arms, and was borne from the cell by her father and the soldier.

Thus David was left to an afternoon and night of black gloom and poignant grief. His hopes of the last three days were shattered. Washington had sent for the only available witnesses, and it was evident that their testimony had not greatly affected his judgment.

On Sunday afternoon there came to the cell a dashing young aide-de-camp, very smart in the elaborate uniform of a staff officer. David was reclining upon his blanket, and the visitor sat down on the keg.

"I am Captain Alexander Hamilton, Mr. Treves," he announced in a kindly tone, "and I am come to offer you the sincere compliments of his excellency, General Washington, and his deepest sympathy and regret."

"I understand, sir," responded David quietly, but the words came forth with a great sigh. "Will you do me the honor, Captain Hamilton, to tender my compliments to his excellency, and say to him that I do not cease to thank him for his gracious kindness to me? I am hardly resigned to my fate, but I accept it as one of the unfortunate incidents of war."

Hamilton leaned forward and placed a hand gently on the prisoner's shoulder.

"Faith, sir," he exclaimed, "I was told that you were a right good fellow, and I believe it now!

"But come, Mr. Treves," he added almost jocularly, "you're not far from my own age, and we youngsters don't give up so readily. It's my unpleasant duty to—well, almost to give you a death-warrant, as it were; but worse men than you, sir, have escaped from under the very noose. War has made you and me enemies, and I promise you I'd be the first to shoot if I saw you attempting to

flee, but— Oh, well, prisoners have escaped from the most vigilant of captors. See, sir—you'll have me quite maudlin in my talk if you keep that long face!"

"I can't keep it for long in such genial company, sir!" declared David, forcing a sorry smile.

"Pray don't think that I'd make light of your trouble," Hamilton added hastily. "I have brought you, at his excellency's request, a Bible and sundry writing materials. If you require other articles for your comfort or convenience, they will be furnished; and on leaving, I shall order for you a table and chair, as well as a comfortable cot. I believe his excellency does not know that your prison is so ill furnished."

The sprightly aide-de-camp, already known as one of Washington's favorites, prolonged his visit to an hour, and David found himself chatting almost lightly with him at the end.

The call had blighted his last lingering hopes, but the virile spirit of the visitor strengthened him in fortitude and prepared him, in a way, for the imminent ordeal.

Monday, the last day, was warm and sultry for late September, and the heat in the cell was stifling as the prisoner spread his writing materials on the small table and prepared for his final melancholy duties. A sentinel was now stationed directly outside the door—the death-watch—and David could hear him panting and cursing the oppressive weather.

When the guard was relieved at ten o'clock, the new sentinel opened the door.

"Look ye, prisoner!" he called out. "I've orders to open the door and give ye air to breathe but ye're not to come near it, an' I'm here to see that ye don't. Ecod! Ye'll have it no hotter nor this, me lad, wherever ye find yerself to-morrow!"

David winced at the brutal jest, but held his peace and sat himself down to his task.

For Jessica he filled a score of pages

with love and heartrending messages of farewell. He bade her seek happiness in the world, as soon as the first shock of parting was over, and cherish him only as a tender memory of early life. Death, he declared, was nothing to him but the killing pain of parting from his love.

He wrote affectionate messages to the Murrys and to Mr. and Mrs. Winnington, and a rather ceremonious, cousinly note to Godfrey and Caroline Treves.

The letters were finished in the afternoon, and he sealed them with wax and left them on the table.

The officer of the guard offered him the attendance of a clergyman, but he asked to be left alone to his own preparations until an hour before the dawn.

It was very quiet now around the barns and the headquarters. The rebel army had been spread out over the country to the north, to fortify the banks of the Hudson and prepare for possible winter quarters at the upper end of the island. Mounted orderlies arrived and departed at intervals, but there was no more passing of wagon trains or marching of troops.

As the sun went down, gradually fading from the tiny window, David covered his eyes with his hands that he might not see the last ray disappear. When darkness came he shook off his spell of gloom, lighted his candle, and fell to reading in the Bible.

He was counting the galloping hours now, and his most stunning shock came with midnight—the beginning of his last day! He heard the sentinels along the scattered posts cry the hour in turn, each one adding the familiar "All's well!" and he bowed his head on the table and groaned.

It was the way of the world: he was to die at sunrise, to leave life and love and the happiness of living, yet the rest of the world was crying "All's well!"

Directly afterward the guard was changed for the next three hours, and the broad back of a new sentinel blocked the still open door.

Another hour sped on flying feet, and just after one o'clock a tall, fierce-mustached sergeant of the guard, with clanking saber and bayoneted musket, came through the barn and spoke to the sentinel gruffly.

"There's not men enough here to furnish ord'lies," he grumbled; "half the guard's on outpost duty to-night. Look you! You're to run with this despatch to Gen'ral Putnam's headquarters, and be sharp about it. It 'll take you an hour, an' it's my job to take your place here till you're back."

The sentinel seemed glad of the chance to go into the open air. He took the despatch and was off directly at a dog-trot, and the tall sergeant blocked the doorway in his place.

David feared that he would assume, by superior authority, a solicitous and talkative attitude, but he cast no more than a sympathetic glance within; and within five minutes he yawned and leaned his great bulk against the door-frame while he fanned himself with his cocked hat.

The prisoner applied himself devotedly to the Bible, and read steadily, with no thought of sleep, until a strange noise brought him up with a start.

The noise was repeated, and it was a stertorous, hearty snore. David leaned forward, vaguely agitated, and peered over the flickering candle to the door.

The sergeant was propped like a dummy against the side of the opening his head was supported by the muzzle of his musket and his breast, and he was snoozing like a man utterly free from care and responsibility.

Instantly, like a flash of inspiration, came back the words of the debonair Captain Hamilton: "Worse men than you, sir, have escaped from under the very noose — from the most vigilant of captors."

And here was, of all things, the *least* vigilant of captors.

David stood for a moment, poised on his toes, breathing hard with excitement. But the opportunity was too rare, too

God-given, to be trifled with, and he waited not another second. A bullet from one of the sentinels outside might end him, but it would be a happy end compared to that which was impending.

He caught up his blanket and wrapped it like a cloak about him, to cover his telltale skirted coat and his knee-buckles; then he crept forward, never breathing, and slipped with infinite caution through the narrow space between the sergeant's big body and the opposite side of the door-frame.

The sergeant snored like a peacefully slumbering ogre.

"Poor fellow!" thought David. "This work may cost him his life, but — it's war! War!"

He stood free in the broad passageway, and saw the blackness of the still, autumn night beyond the great barn door. Three noiseless strides, and he was in the open air. He almost cried out in his wild joy.

A lantern burned on the porch of the mansion, but it was the only light to be seen. Southward was the only way that offered sure liberty, and he went boldly forward toward the main gate, but reconnoitered as he approached it.

The light on the porch threw feeble rays just beyond the gate, and they showed him a slim, rather statuesque sentinel leaning against a tree at the roadside, swinging his musket idly in his left hand. The man was faced straight away from the gate, and for a full minute he did not once turn his head.

It was another chance thrust upon the fugitive by a beneficent and smiling fate.

On quivering toes he went forward. He glided around the gate-post at the left, within six feet of the statuesque watchman, slipped swiftly into the shadow beyond, and then darted down a grassy declivity, ran cautiously, more freely, leaped out with a glad bound, and flew down the slope toward the Harlem River and the neutral valley.

A voice on the heights brought him to a breathless halt. He listened for a cry

of alarm, but a distant sentinel called out: "Two o' the clock! A clear morning, and all's well!"

"Oh, God in Heaven, I thank Thee!" cried David, stretching his arms to the pale stars. "All's well! All's well!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STERN SENSE OF DUTY.

IN the afternoon of Monday, the 23d of September, David emerged from the small farmhouse of a Dutch settler, on the eastern bank of the Harlem, changed in appearance as though by the spells of a magician of the Orient.

His week's growth of beard was shaved lightly in patches, to give it a ragged, uncouth appearance; his eyebrows were trimmed to a new angle, and his dark hair, free from powder, was allowed to straggle over his ears and forehead.

He was dressed in a rough suit of butternut homespun, with coarse woolen hose and clumsy, wooden-soled shoes. On his head flapped a soft, wide peasant's hat, and the heavy pack of a pedler rounded his shoulders till he looked shorter in stature by three inches.

He had pulled across the river in a skiff just before dawn, and with the money left in his pockets by his recent captors had won the heart of the Dutch farmer, and purchased the clothes and pedler's outfit. The farmer, in winter, was wont to take to the road to sell small wares, and had the pack ready filled.

As a final service the Dutchman rowed him back to the west bank of the river, and David swore him to secrecy for the tenth time and went plodding down the river road toward the city.

Near nightfall he halted at a small roadside tavern frequented by farmers and boatmen, unslung his pack, and sat down in the general room to a supper of porridge and hard bread.

"What news from the city, brother?" he said to a countryman on the opposite side of the table.

"Why, the fire's out, they tell me," was the astonishing answer; "but 'tis told there's woful little o' the town left standing."

"News, indeed!" spluttered David, affecting a looseness of speech. "I'm from Westchester, an' I've heard of no fire."

"Save us!" exclaimed the rustic. "Then ye don't know that the city took fire on Saturday, an' burnt Trinity meeting-house, and a thousand houses roundabout?"

David concealed his dismay with difficulty.

"Ye're the first to give me such news, brother," he replied. "Well, well, I might fare ill there with my pack, then. Haply I'd do better to pay a visit to the rebel camp. Do ye know aught of matters thereabouts?"

"Me an' my lad drove a wagon of cabbage there but this morning," answered the rustic, "but we been ill paid. The orf'cers were in bad humor, for some great prisoner had beat the hangman by fleeing away in the night, an' 'twas a sore matter with 'em."

"Now, now!" exclaimed the listener. "How came that about, think ye?"

"Why, 'twas a right strange mystery," was the willing answer. "They do say there's somewhat much amiss in the camp. A sergeant, tall as a sentry-box, sent the prisoner's guard running off with a message an' took the watch 'imself. The guard came back betimes, but the prisoner was flown, an' so likewise was the tall sergeant. Then, sir, 'twas learnt that no such tall sergeant of the guard's description was known to the army, an' the message that was carried by the guard proved no message at all. 'Twas a sorry hoax, an' the orf'cers are biting their nails an' cursing the underlings for knaves an' fools."

David laughed boisterously at the recital, but finished his meal presently and took to the road again. As he trudged along the dark and dusty way, his brain was in a whirl.

Some one had saved his life! Who was the tall sergeant, and by whom was he sent? And again: who was the slender, statuesque sentinel at the gate, who kept his head averted while the fugitive made good his escape?

He pictured again that slim watchman, who must have heard the rustle of his footsteps unless he were deaf, and must have seen the darting shadow but for a sudden blindness. And as he puzzled, another picture shaped itself in his mind.

He gasped at a sudden thought. Could two men be formed as nearly alike as that slim sentinel and Captain Alexander Hamilton?

All at once, he stopped short and clapped his hand to his forehead.

"Great Jove!" he cried aloud. "Could such a thing be? The sergeant was as tall as—as I am! Was his red face real? Did that mustache grow naturally from the lip? And—was—he—asleep?"

"By the high gods," he cried in fresh amazement, "that tall sergeant was no other living man than—"

His teeth came together with a snap.

"He was—the man who saved my poor life," he finished humbly, "and my true friend forever!"

For another minute he stood still in the dark road, then he strode on with a heart throbbing with gladness and deep emotion. The dusty miles rolled away beneath his feet he came to the Boston road and swung into it with joy, and before he realized the distance he had covered, the great house of Ingleberg loomed before him.

It was late, but that house was his destination. He stepped upon the porch and tapped softly at the door. A man servant opened it fearfully, peered out, then ordered 'him savagely away.

A happy inspiration suggested to David the old nickname that Mrs. Murray had applied to him.

"Go tell your mistress, Mrs. Murray," he said, "that a pedler named Petruchio would have speech with her."

The servant closed the door, and

David wondered if it would open again. A minute passed, and then the welcome face of the lady of the mansion looked out upon him.

"Petruchio!" she exclaimed wonderingly, as she gazed at the uncouth figure of the pedler.

"It's Petruchio that is the tamed one this time, dear lady," whispered David, and Mrs. Murray uttered a cry that rang through all the house and caught him in a wild embrace.

"David Treves is alive!" she screamed. "Alive! Alive, and here!"

There was a rush from the inner rooms, and Robert Murray and Mr. Winington dragged the pedler into the drawing-room with frantic joy.

"Jessica!" exclaimed the masquerader inquiringly.

"Ill unto death with a breaking heart," sobbed Mrs. Murray; "but the healing will be speedy, David."

Then Jessica was aroused from the deathlike trance into which she had lain since the previous day and brought to the drawing-room in her father's arms, attended by her sorrowing mother.

Slowly they explained to her that the grimy pedler was her lover, miraculously restored. She listened dumbly for a while with pathetic listlessness then her keen eyes penetrated the disguise, and a torrent of tears broke the killing tension and restored her to life and happiness.

No one slept until David had told his story, but he left the mystery of the two mysterious guards for his listeners to solve in their own way.

Next day he heard with wonder and consternation the full details of the fire that had broken out on Saturday and reduced the city in many parts to a ruin. The treacherous rebel sympathizers were blamed for it, Mr. Murray asserted, and some of them had been put to death already by the royal troops.

"But my cousins—Godfrey and Caroline!" exclaimed David. "Truly, my friends, I am ashamed of my thoughtless-

ness, but I have not thought to ask you where they are and how they fare."

"Never fear, David," said Mrs. Murray; "you may trust Mrs. Caroline to protect her husband and herself. They are once more in possession of your house in Wall Street, and, in the course of events, they have become professed and accredited Royalists and Tories."

"You may well believe that I am amazed," said David; "but, of course, I am highly pleased. I am glad that my house is no longer divided against itself. What of our residence? You say that they are there."

"Your house was providentially spared by the fire," answered Mr. Murray, "and I believe that your cousins were keeping it in order for you when they heard the crushing news of your impending fate. Now they will be overjoyed to know that you are safe."

Later in the day David wrote a cordial letter to Godfrey Treves, announcing his safe return, and congratulating his cousin upon his conversion to the ranks of the Royalists. He sent it into the city by his faithful valet, and on the following day a letter arrived from Godfrey, with a postscript added by Caroline:

Indeed, David, you must yield to Godfrey's urging and visit us at once. You will find your house in order, dear cousin, and we shall welcome you with great joy. You may feel assured that we do not regret our new allegiance, and it will be a rare pleasure to gather about the old table and pledge a family toast to his majesty, the king.

Y'r aff'n'te cousin,

CAROLINE.

David waited another day, loath to leave Jessica even for a few hours; then he drove into the half-ruined city in a post-chaise, to call at the Wall Street mansion and spend an afternoon with his relatives.

Trinity Church was well-nigh razed to the ground, and some three hundred houses were leveled. It was a tragic, dispiriting sight, and he was glad to gain

the shelter of his own roof, and find it sound and much as he had left it.

The welcome accorded him was hearty—it seemed to him just a trifle too hearty. He checked himself in wondering if Godfrey and Caroline would have mourned him sincerely. They were ambitious people, and, in addition to the mansion, they would have received his money from the British funds after his death.

He banished such thoughts in a moment, and sat down gaily to a repast such as Caroline was proud to provide. They toasted the king with a real enthusiasm, and then David, at their request, began a recital of his strange experiences.

He was interrupted presently, however, by the arrival of visitors but Godfrey ordered the butler to bring them directly to the dining-room, and requested David to proceed.

There was a shuffling of feet in the hall, and David turned to see Captain

Goring standing on the threshold, while at his back were three fully armed grenadiers.

Caroline uttered a soft cry and fled suddenly through a side door.

"Captain Goring," said Godfrey, with strange sharpness in his voice, "this is your man."

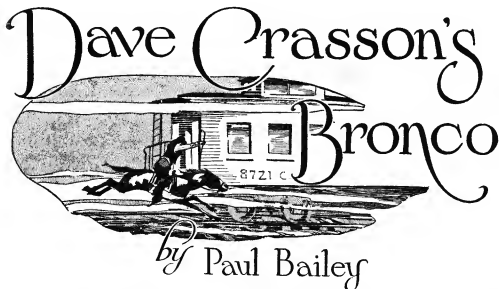
"What?" gasped David, starting back. "Why—"

"David Treves," snapped the British captain, "I arrest you, in the king's name, for treason to the royal government, for consorting with notorious rebels, and for lending aid to the rebel cause."

"Who dares to fasten such accusations upon me?" cried David, livid with rage.

"As a loyal subject," said Godfrey, with a virtuous gravity of countenance, "I was forced most unwillingly to report your duplicity to the military governor. I have done my duty!"

(To Be Continued.)



DAVE CRASSON left Waverly on the afternoon freight. The train didn't stop. It didn't even hesitate.

But Dave Crasson wasn't the sort of individual to let a little thing like that interfere with his very necessary de-

parture. He just raced his pinto along the station platform and, grabbing the side of a car, swung aboard.

Our posse arrived in time to take in the performance and we fired one volley. Then, seeing that Crasson was out of

range and still traveling eastward, we surrounded his bronc.

Well, sir, it was the first time any of us had ever had the opportunity of studying Steamboat at close range. So we roped him from four different angles and then looked him over.

And he returned our scrutiny with such utter unconcern that we all found it mighty hard to believe that this was really Steamboat, the fastest, long-windiest, meanest piece of horseflesh in seven States.

And would you believe it, Sheriff Hazen wished that critter on the Bar D. Maybe it was because we happened to be the nearest outfit to Waverly; maybe because the foreman, yours truly, was an easy mark. Anyhow, Steamboat was given a durable little corral all to himself and became our star boarder.

For three days we didn't do a thing on the place but greet visitors who thought they could ride the critter. For three nights we did nothing but sit up with the victims.

The day Sam Bransford, the world's champion bronco buster, took his turn the Bar D would have made the Denver Round Up look like a game of huck-chuck.

Folks came from miles around. And when we led Steamboat out of his corral they yelled like a pack of Comanches. The pinto was on his metal. Somehow he seemed to know that it was to be a decisive battle, and it was all we could do to get both girths cinched up.

Then we let Bransford ride. That is, the biggest part of the audience was willing and anxious enough that he should ride, but the darned horse just stood up on his hind legs and started rocking like a steamboat. We'd heard of that trick of his. That's how he'd got his name. But we'd never seen it before.

Back-jumping, rainbowing and sunfish-ing had proved effective enough to unseat all previous candidates. Now, however, Steamboat was doing his darnedest. After he'd rocked Bransford's left lung over to

the far side of his right, he just naturally brought down his forelegs stiff, ducked his head and the matinée was over.

That settled it. Steamboat had made good, and we all went back to the even tenor of punching cows for old man Elihu Martin.

Elihu had a daughter, Miss Kate, and along about this time she came home from the East where she had been exchanging some of the old man's beef dividends for a roll of sheepskin. Dave Harkness, the new man, drove her in from the depot at Waverly and they arrived just as our large and appreciative audience was hitting the trail for home.

Of course, Harkness had to tell her all about it, and Harkness was some teller. Having been with the Bar D but two days, he wasn't quite up on all the details, but he told Miss Kate enough about Dave Crasson, the outlaw, and his wonderful horse to fill a dime novel.

He even took Crasson's picture from the bunkhouse and showed her the living likeness of the black-bearded road-agent. Then he led her to the durable little corral and introduced her to Steamboat.

I happened along at that moment.

"Isn't he a beauty?" she says to me, and I choked when I nodded. I'd grown to despise that calico-covered dynamo, and it was hard to acknowledge his good looks.

"But he's a maverick," I told her, hating to see her lose her innocent young heart to such a critter. "Dave Crasson's the only man who ever rode him."

"Surely you don't believe that," she says, pushing a handful of grass over the pickets.

"Well," butts in Harkness, "he didn't until he'd tried the critter himself."

Then we both gasped. Believe it or not, that long, lanky bronco with the wicked rep whinnied like a hungry colt and trotted right up to her.

"Why," says Miss Kate, as he took the grass out of her hand, "I think you boys have been libeling him."

And as she spoke she reached over and

rubbed Steamboat's muzzle. And he liked it.

Yes, sir. The son-of-a-gun liked it. If he hadn't kept one mean eye on me I'd have thought it was another horse.

Inside of twenty-four hours Steamboat and Miss Kate were pals. Before the week was up they were bosom companions, and if it hadn't been for the old man, who had dealt with horses for some thirty years, she'd have tried to ride him.

But Miss Kate and Steamboat didn't furnish the only affair for discussion around the Bar D that summer.

It wasn't more than a week before all hands were talking about the way young Harkness was getting better acquainted with the old man's sole heir. If Harkness hadn't been such a darned likable cuss it might have caused more than a little talk, for the boys all looked upon Miss Kate as the one bright star in a firmament of alkali, hard work, bacon and eggs.

Sometimes I wondered why the old man never seemed to notice the way those two young souls looked at each other as they talked in low tones which nobody else could hear. But it wasn't my funeral. I wasn't her old man.

Besides, the job of foreman on the Bar D didn't allow much time to devote to other folks' affairs. I decided to keep mum.

But decisions don't count when Fate steps in. It happened like this.

I was at Waverly, doing some shopping for the old man, when suddenly I looked up and started. Tacked to the side of Pete Sprague's liquor emporium was a picture of Jake Harkness. The wind or something had got away with the lower half of it, but it was Harkness all right. From the nose up, the only part left, was Jim Harkness.

And across the top of that poster was printed: "Five thousand dollars reward."

Well, sir, I stood and looked at that picture open-mouthed for ten minutes, until finally a stranger came along, touched me on the shoulder and says:

"Do you know him?"

"Know him," says I. "Sure; who is it?"

The stranger grinned.

"Huh," he says. "You must be a newcomer to these parts. Everybody knows that face. Only the black whiskers have been torn off. That's Dave Crasson."

"Oh," says I, and I went inside. But it got me thinking.

I'd seen Crasson's picture all over the country for the past six months. But I'd never before seen it without the whiskers.

When I got back to the Bar D I called Jake Harkness aside. We stood right by Steamboat's corral.

"Jake," says I, "how long since you shaved your whiskers off?"

Well, sir, I told myself then and there if Jake Harkness was Dave Crasson they were both darn good actors. He just simply grinned and says:

"Whiskers? I never had any, Pete."

"Oh, yes, you did," says I. "And you shaved 'em off between the time Dave Crasson hopped the freight at Waverly and Jake Harkness got a job on the Bar D. I'm wise, Jake. Own up."

Laugh? You could have heard him half way to the railroad, but he stopped as quick as he'd begun. Miss Kate stepped in between us. She'd heard it all, and her eyes were flashing mighty prettily.

She bent them right on Dave, and she looked him through and through. But though he'd stopped laughing at her first appearance, he was complete master of himself.

He was more surprised than anything else. And he waited for her to speak.

"Jake," she said, "I heard what Pete said to you. What does he mean?"

"I don't know," said Jake, and I figured that I'd been a bit hasty.

She turned to me. "What did you mean?" she asked, her eyes still flashing.

"Well," said I, judging that I might as well own up and then apologize, "I saw a picture of Dave Crasson to-day, over at Waverly. All that was left of

it was from the nose up, and Miss Kate, believe it or not, it was the image of Jake here. So when I got home I just made up my mind to ask him if, by any chance, he happened to be next of kin or otherwise related to the road agent."

"You mean," corrected Miss Kate, "that you thought Jake might be Dave Crasson himself?"

Her question made it easier. I nodded.

Again she turned to Jake, studied him several minutes and asked:

"Are you Dave Crasson?"

He was serious now. An accusation like mine was enough to make any one serious. He returned her gaze without a flicker as he said:

"Miss Kate, my name's Jake Harkness. I never saw Dave Crasson and, if luck's with me, I never will. Do you believe me?"

She studied him again before committing herself. Then she nodded.

"Yes, Jake," she said. "I do." Then, to me, "Pete, it was horrid of you to think such an awful thing of him."

"I know it," I answered, "and I'm awfully sorry."

I stuck out my hand, Jake grabbed it and the incident was closed without bloodshed.

But somehow or other I couldn't get that picture of Dave Crasson out of my head. I'd lay awake nights thinking of it and, at times, I'd almost make up my mind to talk it over with the old man.

But I never did. Jake Harkness proved to be too much of an asset to the Bar D. Before the summer was over he had become an absolute necessity to the outfit, and when I told the old man as much, he said he'd known it himself for some weeks.

So things drifted along. Miss Kate and Harkness became thicker and thicker, and before cold weather set in it was generally understood around the Bar D that Jake was about to take unto himself a wife, and Old Man Martin a son-in-law. And the boys were tickled to death. Harkness was a popular cuss. Yes, sir,

even I, who still entertained a sneaking notion that he had some sort of a past that wasn't in his family Bible, was looking forward to that wedding.

Then things occurred. First, a Kentucky thoroughbred arrived as a sort of preliminary wedding gift from the old man to the blushing bride. And he was some horse.

Speed? He went over the trail like a German torpedo, and I ought to know. I tried him out. And after I'd pronounced him safe and sane Jake Harkness hopped astride.

I'd never seen Jake on a spirited horse before. He was a stickler for easy-gaited mounts, the kind that don't go in for the fancy steps. But, Hercules, how he did ride that thoroughbred!

Say, there wasn't a man on the place that didn't wonder how he'd kept his accomplishments under cover, and Miss Kate laughed in sheer pride. As for me, my mind reverted to that torn picture of Dave Crasson, and I looked over toward Steamboat's corral.

It gave me an idea.

"Jake," said I, after he'd circled the house a couple of times and then hopped down, "you're the only man hereabouts, outside the boss, that's never had a try at Steamboat. I'm thinking you could make the critter go some."

"Sam Bransford couldn't," he says, easy like, as he helped Miss Kate to mount her preliminary wedding gift.

She looked down at him and smiled. Maybe she had thoughts something like mine. Maybe she was thinking of the story about no man but Dave Crasson ever riding Steamboat. Anyhow, she said:

"Why don't you try him, Jake?"

What could he do? The boys had the dynamo under saddle and out in the open before you could say Daniel Boone. And Jake, looking as if he was about to enter the electric chair, stepped forward.

Fight? Well, some. Harkness started it with an Indian yell and a savage slap on the flank. Up went the pinto, and

when he'd risen to the full extent of his long hind legs he commenced rocking.

It was gruesome,*for we could see Jake Harkness slowly succumbing to the torture. Then down, headforemost went Steamboat and headforemost went Harkness to the turf.

I tell you, I was relieved. It didn't look like acting. I glanced at Miss Kate, and she was relieved, too. Every ounce of suspicion went out of us then and there. And in her happiness, Miss Kate just slapped that thoroughbred across the neck and he bolted.

Off went her hat, one stirrup flew wild and the brute was running away.

Miss Kate didn't yell. No. She wasn't that kind of a girl. She stuck to the little English saddle, and she pulled on those reins with all her strength. But it wasn't enough. The horse had the bit between his teeth, and he was boss.

Yes, sir, and there wasn't another horse under saddle on the whole place; that is, none except Steamboat. And I guess he was the only one that could have caught the thoroughbred anyway.

However, some of the boys beat it for the corral. They had to do something. And I might have gone, too. But as I swung around I saw something that turned my blood cold, and let me say right here and now that I was darned glad to see it.

Jake Harkness had leaped toward Steamboat. Snatching up the dangling reins, he went clean to the saddle without so much as touching the stirrups.

And Steamboat? He just stood rigid until Jake had whispered something in his ear. Then, pivoting, he went after that runaway like a bolt of Texas lightning.

And it sure was exquisite. A half mile up the trail went a cloud of dust which was Miss Kate and her preliminary wedding gift. And when Steamboat got under full headway that cloud of dust didn't seem to be doing much more than just moving.

Harkness must have put in some slick

work, for when the action ceased and the dust drifted clear he had that thoroughbred on one side of him and Miss Kate on the other, his arm about her, and Steamboat was trotting back toward us as meek as my old Bess.

Harkness was Crasson all right. There wasn't a man on the place who didn't know it. But say, you ought to have seen the boys grab his hands when he got down, after handing Miss Kate to me.

And you ought to have seen Miss Kate look at him when she'd finally got over the scare. When she spoke we all listened.

"Jake," she said, "why did you lie to Pete and me that day by the corral?"

"Because I loved you," he said, and he seemed awful stuck up about it.

"You see," turning to me, "I'd decided to go straight when I hopped the freight at Waverly. But later I wanted to be near Steamboat. He was the only friend I'd ever had. I planned to get away with him and go East. Then I met Miss Kate. I couldn't leave. But I guess it's all over now. If some of you will come along I'll just jog over and give myself up to Sheriff Hazen."

"No you won't neither," said I, before I realized that it wasn't up to me to pronounce the sentence.

I noticed that the boys all nodded, and Miss Kate grabbed Jake's right hand and said:

"Of course you won't. Your real name, Jake, is going to remain a secret with everybody on the Bar D. You can't go unless you take me."

Well, sir, Jake Harkness is my boss now. The old man just sits around and smokes his pipe, and plays with the two little Harknesses.

And when Jake goes into Waverly on Steamboat folks look at him and say: "Harkness and Dave Crasson are the only men who ever rode that pinto."

And if any of us happen to be trailing along we grin and think of the day Steamboat made that preliminary wedding gift look like a crippled coyote.

Fighting the Egg King



"WHAT are we coming to?" The youth held his three companions enthralled by what he had been saying and the fire that flared in his eyes. "Where are we going to end?" he continued. "Food riots have commenced. The mob begins to rule. Next, bomb play will be introduced and death—"

He threw out his hands in a prophetic gesture.

"That's the result, fellows," he went on, growing more voluble in his wildness. "Why, look here. Do you know that the investigation which the Federal government has been conducting into the high food prices has resulted in the verdict that the prices are occasioned by speculators, food manipulators and that the conditions are facilitated by a general car shortage, and all that? And then the commission adjourns without recommending a single remedy.

"I tell you, boys, we'll never get satisfaction in this country, we'll never rid ourselves of high prices and speculators, until we take drastic measures. Hang a

few of these millionaires who corner the food market and shake millions into their coffers."

He paused a minute and glanced through the Pullman.

Karby, seated three chairs behind the fellow, met his wild eyes with an even but interested stare.

It was apparent that Karby had at first been amused, then infected by the youth's ardor and enthusiasm. A magazine lay face upward across Karby's knees, but it had gone unread for some moments. A pretty girl in the chair diagonally opposite had also lowered a book and listened.

Her face had changed color slightly at the wild suggestion of capital punishment for food speculators; Karby's fleeting glance caught the expression, and he vaguely wondered at it as he prepared to hear what further the youth had to expound.

It was very evident that his stronger arguments were about to burst forth. He cleared his throat, straightened to a more commanding attitude and stretched forth

his long arms as though preparing for emphatic gesticulation.

"There's our own town for example. Potatoes selling for three-fifty a bushel—that's at the rate of about three cents apiece. Think of it—more than we paid for lemons two years ago. And that isn't all. Mr. Grimes, our butter man, told us the other day that he has five hundred bushels of potatoes in his cellars and that he has been paid a big price by some agent who came along two weeks ago not to sell these potatoes for at least three months. These agents have gone all over the country making similar overtures to farmers, in order to keep low the potato supply—and thus permit prices to be boosted."

He took another breathing spell, swallowed and plunged into his subject again.

"There's Truxton, in our own town—Cassius Stanley Truxton, who says boldly that he's going to clean up a million dollars in eggs. He doesn't make any bones about it—puts his fingers through his vest and comes right out with the information that he has two hundred thousand gross of eggs in cold storage—gross, not dozens—and that he's going to hold them until the price soars and then he'll sell, and what, he asks insolently, is the public going to do about it?"

"Do about it? Nothing, of course. What can the public do about it when the government permits such proceedings? And he's only one of the many speculators who has cornered eggs all over the United States.

"There's sugar," he exploded, going off on another tack. "For a year the speculators have been trying to corner the sugar market and have at last succeeded. Sugar sells at twenty cents a pound in some of our larger cities and the supply is so low that many houses can't get a bit of it. Fine state of affairs—for a peaceful nation, a country that isn't at actual war with anybody—prices higher than they are in Germany—in England. Do you know what they're paying right now for potatoes in Toronto, and they

think the price exorbitant? Sixty-five cents a bushel. That's a fact—have a cousin living in Toronto who wrote that to me.

"Now I do not believe in mob rule and anarchy," he went on in quieter tones, as though he realized he had broached a ticklish subject. "But what are the people to do when the government that rules them sits back and discusses the situation in cabinet meetings and then suggests an appropriation of four hundred thousand dollars for a thorough investigation which they propose to extend over a period of six months.

"Six months, when the food crisis is on us now? Six months, when the people in our large city slums are starving? Six months when anarchy threatens now? Might as well operate on a man after he is dead as to say they will deal with this situation in six months.

"Do you fellows know what it is to starve—to feel the pinch of hunger gnawing at your stomachs? I had a touch of it once—was lost three days on a hunting trip in northern Canada. I tell you hunger will make people do anything. No, six months' investigations will not help. What we want is action, drastic action now, now."

He shouted the final *now* till the car rang with the noise. There fell a silence.

After his burst of oratory, the silence hung like the hush which follows the boom of a great gun. Karby stared reflectively at this young firebrand. He had spoken fanaticism, yes. But there was great thought behind his words—a prophetic warning—a review of the situation which was startling.

Karby glanced at the girl diagonally opposite. Her cheeks were red with the flush that had bespread them some time ago, and her eyes, like his, stared with a studied expression as though her mind might be rehearsing the better points the young fellow had made.

"What suggestions would you offer?" one of his companions now asked the speaker.. "

"I? I would suggest drastic action at once, by the government. But do you know what I would do if I was one of these peculiar millionaires who had so much money he didn't know what to do with it, and yet who couldn't get any pleasure, any enjoyment out of life? We read about these fellows occasionally in the yellow journals. Here's the case for instance of a multimillionaire who kills himself because he couldn't get anything out of life—who had been melancholy for months. There are lots of these men. Well, if I was one of them, I'd get some excitement, some enjoyment out of this very situation. Do you know what I'd do? Well, I'll tell you.

"I'd take a town like our own, for example, where the food prices are high, where there resides an egg king like our friend, Truxton. I'd go into that town and secretly I'd rent a hall, a place like the old fair building on South Street, for example. Then I'd hire an army of men to work for me, and I'd stock that place with everything in the food line I could get hold of. I'd spend millions, send men out through the country to buy up potatoes, eggs, vegetables, canned goods, preserves, everything in the eating line, and then one day I'd throw my place open—after I had such a supply that they couldn't buy me out in a month, and I'd slash prices, I'd practically give the goods away.

"And eggs?—I'd sell them for fifteen, twenty cents a dozen and put this man Truxton out of business. It wouldn't benefit the country at large one whit, but, by George, I'd be one millionaire who'd be getting some enjoyment and excitement out of life.

"Excitement! Why, I'd have a thousand speculators at me, threatening, bribing, coaxing. That's what I'd do. It's an idle dream, a vision, but I'd do it if I had millions of money at my control. And then Truxton could rot with the eggs he's piled up!"

Karby was leaning forward as if at a play of intense dramatic situations. He

stared at this orator as though he had been a Luther.

Karby's calm gray eyes were now fired and spit forth glints like bits of chipped steel. His hands were trembling. There was a perspiration oozing over his broad, high forehead.

For a second he glanced toward the pretty girl—feeling a sort of companionship for her from the fact that he and she were in reality the immediate audience.

The girl's face was crimson and she was a prey to confusion. Karby stared at her, fascinated by the guilt which seemed to shine in her features.

She swept her eyes up. Karby caught his breath with a jerk. They were deep eyes, pretty, wide set, and the blue in them now seemed gray, now blue, now gray again. They were eyes which Karby knew he would remember long after he had forgotten the accompanying details of her face, eyes which he might awaken at night to see staring at him out of the vistas of his memory.

For a second Karby forgot the oratory and the subject that had so stirred him and lost himself in staring at the girl. Coming to at last, he turned away his glance.

At that minute the porter bustled into the car and began his obsequious and remunerative task of wielding the whisk-broom.

At the next station the orator and his three friends prepared to alight, and their conversation told Karby that this was their home town. Without more ado he followed them from the train, hailed a cab and directed to be driven to the best hotel.

Karby had found a way of buying himself such an interest in life as he had never possessed. As his cab swung out of the station, he saw the pretty girl who had sat diagonally opposite him being handed into a wonderful motor-car by a chauffeur who was the last word in adornment as far as livery was concerned, and in the rear of the car a striking looking

man, tall and broad and rather gray, made room for her beside him.

II.

ONE month later the old fair building on South Street was the scene of wonderful activity.

It was a gigantic frame structure which covered one square block of ground. Time had weather-eaten its paint and its ornate embellishments, but its hugeness was still intact, it yet loomed up big and Titanic on a dark night, a picture of desolation, a reminder of days when the whole county dispensed with business for the greater part of a week and journeyed here in droves to witness an exhibition which to them was the epitome of expositions.

It was ten years since the place had responded to the call of human patronage, and dust and swallows and sparrows, bats, owls, spiders, and pigeons had usurped the interior and by right of conquest claimed it as their own.

But now the great double doors in each of the four streets were standing wide open, teams were driving in and out, a veritable thousand men were scurrying over the place like rats.

The interior reverberated with the sound of banging hammer and sledge. Joists came down and new and stronger ones replaced them. Men ran hither and thither with blueprints and folding rules.

Superintending the work of construction, consulting with foremen and bosses, was Nathan Karby. He was ubiquitous, now on the inside of the building, now on the out, directing the laying of a railroad siding to his unloading platform. His aims seemed to be speed, unity of action, concentration of work to one end in view.

A glance told the most casual that his word was law, that neither blueprint nor plan, verbal nor written contract mattered a whit. What he said went.

As one day followed another and this army of workmen continued their labor, order began to emanate from the chaos of beams, lumber, stone, brick, tiling. Six great, long aisles which ran the whole

length of the building paralleled each other like six great streets of a city. These aisles were very wide, and soor they were equipped with counters, bins glass cases, shelves, cupboards, drawers.

In his quarters at the Jefferson Hotel Karby had set up an improvised office, and here behind a flat top desk he interviewed agents, sellers, farmers, grange officials, salesmen. At the same time he recruited an army of workers whom he sent out through the country, into neighboring cities and villages. These agents spread over the land like the tentacles of an octopus, and they went equipped with cash and bought and bought and bought.

Karby was elated. He was purchasing his interest in life. His gray eyes shone. He caught his breath and thrust out his firm jaw and smacked his thin lips when he anticipated the scenes in which he would soon participate.

The moneyed men of the community would sweep down on him in droves. The food speculators and manipulators would haunt him like a bad dream. He would welcome these scenes. He could scarcely wait for them to develop.

One noon when Karby returned to the Jefferson for luncheon he noticed in the lobby myriads of young girls who were accosting the hotel guests in quest of funds for one of the city hospitals. Karby had read in the daily papers that a campaign was being inaugurated to raise a hundred thousand dollars. People were tagged with a yellow check as they responded with contributions.

Karby had escaped the campaigners in the street by reason of the fact that he drove a motor-car and had been off too early in the morning to be approached. But now the minute he stepped into the hotel a most charming young lady picked him out as her victim and came hurrying toward him.

Karby paused and found himself looking into the same pair of beautiful eyes that he had looked into that day on the train.

As his gaze met hers, Karby saw that

she recognized and placed him on the instant. The slightest shade of confusion swept over her for a second and brought a tinge to her cheek and a downward sweep of the long, brown lashes.

In this nearer view of her Karby was astounded that such a charming creature had been displaced for a single day in his memory by his absorption in his scheme.

"Perhaps you have read of the campaign to raise money for an addition to one of our city hospitals," she began tremulously and not without a trace of confusion. "We're trying not to miss anybody and thought perhaps some of the guests at our hotels might want to subscribe."

"I suppose it's a worthy object," Karby said easily, playing for time for the purpose of detaining the girl longer. "I'm a stranger here, you know."

"Oh, indeed, I can vouch for the worthiness of this hospital. They do need money so badly and they must have more room, or I don't know what they will do. We will be so grateful for anything you may care to give." She selected a tag from a bundle in her hands and made ready to tie it through the lapel of his coat.

"I should think that in these times," Karby replied, still angling for some scheme to detain the girl "that a couple of gross of good fresh eggs would be about as acceptable as anything else to a hospital."

Karby had intended to elaborate on the remark and give it quite a facetious turn, but the girl's actions checked him.

She flushed red to the roots of her hair, deep, deep red; her eyes went down, and he saw her lips quiver. When her lashes went up, he saw that her eyes were wet with tears of wounded pride and hurt vanity.

She stared at him for just a second, then turned so cold that her very glance chilled him to the bone. Then she seemed to rise straighter than ever as she stood there like a statue.

"I should not have accosted you,"

she said icily. "I should have known that one must expect to find your type—in hotels."

She made as though to move past him, but he touched her on the arm and detained her.

"I beg your pardon," he said sincerely. "Believe me, I meant no offense whatever. I am so sorry. I'll admit my remark was ill chosen, to one who is a stranger to me. I apologize. I want you to accept something—for this worthy cause."

"I do not care to have my name mentioned or even known—but if you will wait here just a bit while I go to the bank and draw my contribution in cash. I should like to give a thousand dollars. You will wait and you will assure me that you have overlooked my remark?"

He smiled at her, and his smile was nearly as contagious as her own. She murmured something in the affirmative, and he was gone. When he came back he handed her a sealed envelope and permitted her to tie a tag to his lapel.

Was it fate or destiny or marvelous coincidence that the very next day on motoring into the country to interview some farmers engine trouble left him stranded miles from the city, and she happened along in a huge touring-car, ordered her chauffeur to stop and render aid, and his car refusing all calls to motion, she was unconventional enough to give him a lift back to town?

Moreover she was affable to the extent of engaging in conversation, a tribute which the occasion did not necessarily demand of her. Karby was elated.

Meantime work progressed rapidly on the old fair building. Such an army of men must soon accomplish results. Karby spared no expense, was thorough to a detail, although his natural business ability saw to it that no cash was wasted.

In two weeks the building was nearing completion, and the traffic manager, whom Karby had imported from one of the larger railroads, began delivering carload after carload of foodstuffs.

It seemed as though the world's production of potatoes was being emptied into the building. Karby's agents penetrated the country to its depths. Motor-cars had driven them into localities where the food shortage and the speculator had not set foot, and they were able to buy at prices far under those demanded by wholesalers in the cities.

Karby himself marveled at the miles which these provisions were covering to reach him. Without being conscious of it he had whipped together a wonderful organization.

And not alone potatoes came flooding into his place. Every known popular and necessary edible which mankind caters to, came in superabundance.

Of course, the town soon began to wonder about the project. The press sent reporters in droves to interview foremen, laborers, superintendents, contractors, but Karby himself had given no information to a single soul, and therefore they could divulge nothing.

Rumor and idle gossip and speculation ran high. The newspapers supplied fiction where facts were lacking, and by publishing something which was not true, tempted Karby to state his real purpose—a trick of the press, by the way—but Karby only smiled and held his peace.

He meant to open his great relief store, as he called it, on a Monday morning, and the preceding Sunday he intended to carry a brief but glaring ad in the papers of the town, stating his list of prices and his purpose in selling at cost or below. The whole gigantic affair was to be a loss to Karby from beginning to end. Financiers would have stood back appalled at the idea, and had they seen his expense accounts and compared them with his intended selling prices, they would have succumbed to emotion or voted Karby a subject for an asylum.

Karby forgot no detail. As the time approached to divulge his great scheme, he employed a corps of detectives and upon their advice procured the services of two hundred special deputies. His money

brought certain politicians to exert their power which made the deputies possible.

These deputies guarded the building day and night. It was a necessary precaution. Food manipulators were none too exacting about the means they employed, and Karby was advised that once his scheme was out and the finer points of his great plan were discovered, the rage of the speculators would soar and they might possibly stoop to force to thwart his scheme.

Meantime his detectives were busy taking such steps as would prevent speculators' agents invading the store when it did open and buying up the foodstuffs.

On Friday the building was an arsenal of provisions. And it was on this Friday about four o'clock that the storm broke.

Karby had returned to the hotel early and was sitting at his desk framing the advertisement which he desired for the Sunday press, when Mason, one of his clerks, entered and informed him that a delegation of six men desired to see him, that they would present no cards and appeared to be the gloomiest, surliest group of individuals he had ever seen.

Karby sent out a detective to explain that he was at present engaged and would be unable to see them. He also ordered the detective to discover if possible something of their identities and to refuse to book them for any interview, as he didn't wish to argue his position to anybody.

The detective returned, sweltering. He declared he had never put in such a ten minutes, that the six had nearly torn him to pieces and he had only got rid of them by threatening to call for help and have them ejected forcibly from the suite. He also reported that the big man of the assemblage was Truxton, the egg king, and that he had with him a man named Macavey, his secretary, and a farmer whom the detective discovered was president of one of the granges. Another of the men was proprietor of a large wholesale house in the city, and the remaining two he could find nothing about.

From that moment on Karby was more

sought after than the President of the United States. A double and then a quadruple guard was placed before his suite, and all afternoon and late into the evening men came, excited men, enraged men, perturbed men, men who pleaded, threatened, then pleaded again to be granted an interview.

Karby turned them all down. He would see no one whose business he did not know beforehand.

He was forced to dine in his rooms as a precaution against annoyance, and he spent the evening reading the town's papers. The reporters had at last hit upon something like the truth and had displayed the news in glaring headlines.

This no doubt was responsible for his popularity and had set the six excited men on his heels. Speculation ran high.

One sheet carried a brief editorial, commenting in a general way on the rumor and offering neither praise nor condemnation of the plan. Karby smiled. He ordered the night guard at the store doubled, and went to bed.

The next morning early the interviewers started their vigil and lined up in the corridor outside his door until the place looked like the floor of the New York stock exchange. At eleven Karby applied to the hotel management for aid, with the result that the police were called in, cleared the corridors, patrolled the place and kept it clear.

At eleven-thirty one of the policemen brought Karby a card stating that a very beautiful woman had sent it in and desired to see Mr. Karby on a matter of the utmost importance.

Karby glanced at the name on the card, which read simply:

MISS TRUXTON.

III.

KARBY stared at the card as though fascinated. At first his calm and rather tantalizing smile puckered his lips, but he sobered immediately and studied the situation a second.

So they had got a delegate through at last—they were resorting to a woman to tell their message—the egg king's daughter.

Karby's sense of chivalry produced a struggle within him. Ordinarily he would have been invulnerable to this means of reaching him—but if a woman of breeding was willing to sacrifice her pride to the extent of coming here to see him, he believed he should grant the interview.

He told the policeman to admit her.

Karby went to the window and stood looking out. He heard her enter, heard the door close softly, heard her take a step into the place and then pause, apparently to collect herself.

This was what Karby desired. He turned slowly and looked into the exquisite eyes of the woman on the train, the very girl who had approached him in the hotel lobby soliciting donations to Lakeside Hospital.

She was dressed in a tailored suit and presented that well-groomed and well-tended appearance that had so impressed him when he first saw her. She wore a hat which rather shielded her face, but it did not prevent his seeing the look of incredulity that swept into her features as she recognized him.

As for himself, Karby was not sure whether he changed color or no. He merely stared at her, again a prey to her exquisite eyes.

It was a shock, the knowledge that this girl was the egg king's daughter, and even as he stood there looking at her, the realization of the situation came over him.

The plan of his general relief store, the slashing of prices, the eggs he already had in stock which he was going to sell for a song—all meant ruin, financial downfall for Truxton. He had known this before—all along and had even counted on it, but now, the realization seemed to turn cold and dampen his ardor.

The girl was the first to recover herself. She came forward holding out her hand and smiling frankly into his eyes.

"I am so glad to find some one here—

that I know. I've come to see Mr. Karby—you will present me to him—it will make things so much easier for me."

Great Heavens, she hadn't yet awakened to the real situation! He smiled rather wistfully, shook his head slowly and said quietly "Miss Truxton, I am Mr. Karby."

The horror that came into her features was only compensated by their beauty. Her eyes opened until he imagined he was looking into two wonderful worlds, and she fell back one, two, three paces and stared at him.

Karby turned slightly to give her a chance to recover from the shock of his announcement. When he faced her again, she was staring calmly at him, her big eyes regarding him with something of awe.

"I hadn't dreamed that you were Mr. Karby, although I might have guessed—put two and two together. You were on the train that day and heard the wild talk of that wild youth. Mr. Karby,"—she took a step forward and stared hard at him—"it isn't true that you're going to open your store and sell—at such low prices that it will ruin those who have stocked up on things—hoping to sell when the price was up?"

Karby smiled. He shook his head slowly in the affirmative and said quietly: "I'm afraid it's all true, Miss Truxton. I'm putting into effect the very idea which that wild youth, as you call him, declared he would follow if he was one of those eccentric and peculiar millionaires who couldn't get any enjoyment out of life."

She stared at him, permitting him the fullest view of her wonderful eyes and the sweet features that went with them.

Karby caught his breath. He found a madness seizing upon him, a madness which he thrust back with an effort.

"You know what they call my father?" she went on slowly.

"The egg king—though I didn't know until now—that you were his daughter. I understand now why my remark that day caused you such annoyance, but I was not aware of your identity then."

She passed over the explanation as though she considered it trivial in comparison with what she had come to say.

"You will slash the price on eggs, Mr. Karby?"

"Storage eggs for twenty cents per dozen, fresh ones for twenty-five, and the strictest kind of fresh eggs, guaranteed, for thirty."

"It means financial ruin to my father," she said slowly, her eyes not meeting his directly but staring at the wall as though she were speaking some speech which she had committed to memory. "He has two hundred thousand gross of eggs in storage—Listen, Mr. Karby, my father stands ready to buy up every egg you possess for forty cents a dozen if you will agree not to stock up any more."

Karby shook his head and smiled.

"No, Miss Truxton, I can't be bought, neither can the eggs I have. Those eggs are for housewives who haven't had the privilege of owning eggs in any quantity for months. Men who have cornered the egg market will have to suffer along with those people who cornered potatoes, sugar. Your father is not the only one, Miss Truxton."

"But, Mr. Karby, my father has done no wrong. Why, people buy real estate and hold it until prices go 'way up and then sell. It's the legitimate way to make money. Why do you enter into this wild scheme? You're losing millions of dollars by it."

"Exactly, Miss Truxton." He paused, collected himself and faced her squarely.

"Miss Truxton, it was more than coincidence that day which brought me a listener to that wild youth with his fanatical scheme. But I was one of the very men he described, a millionaire, if you will permit me the term for lack of a better, who could see nothing interesting in life.

"I was a veritable nomad on the face of the earth. That very trip I was making had no definite destination in view. I was just going from one place

to another seeking something that would enliven me, and I found it.

"Never in all my existence have I been so keenly interested in life as now. This exploit has made me. I shall never forget it. Of course, I shall be losing millions by the scheme, but what of it? It is my own money.

"Moreover I am not stupid enough to believe that this one relief store, as I call it, will affect the prices of the country in general. It won't. It can't. But it satisfies me, serves my purpose and some of the people will benefit by it."

"And you would not consider selling out your eggs to father at the price he named?"

"Most decidedly no, Miss Truxton."

"Well, remember, Mr. Karby, that I came to you and made you an offer. Don't forget this. I wanted to give you a chance. You spurned it. Men, Mr. Karby, don't give up easily, especially when they see their fortunes slipping away, as you threaten to make them slip away. Good-by, Mr. Karby."

Before he could reply she was gone.

Karby stared after her, rehearsing her final words and trying to ferret out their hidden meaning. Why had she come to see him?

Had old Truxton really offered to buy his eggs or had she come for some other purpose? She had given him a chance. Her final speech hinted at trouble—seemed to insinuate a threat.

What did these food speculators mean to do? What scheme had her father concocted to thwart him? And did she know that scheme. Her words sounded as though she did.

That night at nine he had the answer. It came by phone and was from one of his special deputies on guard at the store.

A mob was collecting about the building, a mob already a thousand strong, a mob that threatened violence, had been stirred up by the news that the goods were stock which Karby had cornered and that he was going to sell at top notch prices and squeeze the people.

Karby saw it all now. He jumped into his car and headed for the store.

IV.

If the rabble was a thousand strong when the message reached him they had doubled by the time he arrived at the outskirts of the crowd. He parked his machine and proceeded on foot.

Whoever had stirred up the mob and had put the riot idea into their heads had done a good work for the speculators. There were women in the horde, wild-eyed women, some holding babies in their arms, some leading children by the hand.

It was a motley throng, a throng of all nationalities, speaking polyglot tongues. And above all came the cry of "We are hungry, we are hungry!"

Alcohol had done its work. Money must have been disbursed freely. The move was hardly one of eleventh hour fomentation, but had been brewed all through the day, possibly for several days.

Karby stood aghast. No one knew him. He was safe. But his heart sank. His two hundred deputies were on duty, but violence might ensue and death might result. And this Karby wished to avoid.

The instigators had done their parts thoroughly. Karby could tell by the stray bits of talk he picked up.

A millionaire who had been working for months cornering potatoes, sugar, eggs, was ready to unload on the public at hitherto unheard of high prices. The people were to be robbed. He was one of the causes of the food shortage throughout the country.

Karby stood bewildered by what he heard. He listened to threats against his life, violence against the building which housed his provisions, the provisions he had been weeks collecting for the relief of these poor deluded creatures.

Karby censured himself for his lack of foresight. If he had only advertised his sales in the Saturday papers instead of waiting until Sunday, all would have been well. But now!

To-morrow's quotations would lead the

people to believe that it was the mob that had forced him to the low prices and that they had not been his intention from the first.

If only he could work his way to the front, but this was impossible. He must stand here, an idle spectator and await developments.

And then the mob closed in, pressed together, made of itself a body more compact. A great din arose. Shouts and jeers rent the air. Threats were no longer muttered beneath breaths or hissed into the ears of near-by companions, but were shouted openly.

A few police, perhaps thirty or forty appeared on the outskirts of the crowd and tried to disperse the people, but mobs and riots were new to the police of this city and they were incompetent to handle the situation. The hope their presence had inspired in Karby died.

By this time the rabble had pressed so close to the building that Karby was scarcely forty feet from it. He could see a dim light burning through the windows and his deputies on guard armed to the teeth.

The rioters increased their shouts and jeers. Waves of motion rippled over the mob as though they meant to rush the place and storm it by force. Some one presently hurled a brick which crashed through a window. At the noise of falling glass the crowd went crazy.

Karby sickened. It was all over. They were on the verge of violence. His deputies might control the situation by the use of arms, but this would be awful. Then suddenly the whole building blazed forth with light and made the surrounding scenery bright as day.

Men could be seen hurrying to and fro in the store, and presently in every window there was posted one of the huge placards bearing the prices which were to go into effect Monday morning.

The jeers of the crowd died. Silence developed. Those who could read English perused the signs hungrily. Presently a low hum rippled through the mob. They

were translating to their companions what they saw.

Again semblance of silence ensued as though the rabble were considering their course. This was intruded upon by yells of "It's a lie! It's a game! Don't believe those signs!" and Karby knew these cries came from paid instigators.

Some shouted to burn the place, provisions and all, while others shrieked to storm it and carry the foodstuffs away. But the majority were quiet.

The printed prices were there before their eyes. The multitude were plainly puzzled and perhaps disappointed. They had come to do violence. They were to be cheated of their prey.

This was to be a store for *them*. These prices were within *their* reach. There was something wrong.

In vain did the instigators try to incite violence, try to rush the people forward in a great attacking movement. But the throngs were plainly stirred, and Karby knew by the attitude of those near him that they had been impressed.

The psychology of the mob is a study. It is like a torpedo—it must be handled rightly or it may boomerang and attack those that assembled it.

Some one suddenly shouted at the top of his lungs, "Let's get the egg king. He's cornered eggs. He admits it. He asks what is the public going to do about it. Let's show him. To the egg king's house, to the egg king's house!"

Karby caught a glimpse of the fellow who had raised the cry. It was the orator who had spoken that day on the train.

In a second the mob had taken up the slogan, and Karby heard the noise of rushing feet, and the next instant the whole mass swung into movement and dashed on their way. Karby was swept along with them.

His mind worked fast. Once they gained Truxton's house the rage they would have vented on his store and foodstuffs would burst forth with increased and added vigor. Karby dared not think

what they might do to the place. They were armed with all sorts of weapons and would as soon fire the mansion as anything else, and once this rabble understood the real situation—and it was likely that some one in the crowd might stumble upon the truth at any second—their rage would know no bounds.

Karby thought frantically. He slowed his pace and permitted the rushing madmen to pass him. Presently he found himself so separated from the stragglers that he stopped altogether, turned and made for his automobile. He gained it, jumped in, swung past his building and sang out orders to his deputies to leave two or three of them on guard—and for the others to hurry to the house of the egg king.

The orders were received rather sullenly and there were signs of rebellion, but the promise of a handsome reward if they saved the place effected the desired change, and Karby was satisfied to see them start forth in pursuit of the mob, to do what they could to quell the riot.

Karby then took one of them into his car to show him the way to the Truxton house. Down one street, up another they flew, taking the shortest route in the effort to get there before the mob arrived.

Karby could hear the rioters in the distance, and urged his car to greater speed. At last a huge residence loomed into view. Karby alighted and rushed through the spacious grounds, up a broad flight of front steps on to a wonderful veranda and rang the bell.

A butler responded, and Karby did not wait for ceremony, but brushed past him into the house. He burst into a room where he heard voices, and threw into violent agitation Miss Truxton, her mother, and Truxton himself, who was at a desk-phone in smiling conversation with somebody.

V.

THE egg king was a tall man, well developed and broad. His hair was gray, his eyes active but rather small and

sparkling. He lowered the phone and stared aghast as Karby swept into the room and rushed toward him.

"Quick, you've not a minute to lose. Escape from this house at once. The mob you stirred up against me, Truxton, has turned on you and is now headed here, shouting 'Get the egg king, get the egg king!'"

They only stared at him, apparently too overcome to comprehend what his words meant.

Mrs. Truxton, a sweet rather weak-faced woman who looked as though her very life was dominated by this husband of hers, showed signs of swooning. Truxton himself rose slowly to his feet.

"You are Karby," he began, and it was evident he intended working himself into a rage, but Karby interrupted him.

"Yes, I am Karby, but for God's sake, hurry. That mob which your own agents stirred up is mad, mad, not alone out of belief in the justice of their cause, but mad from the alcohol which your money furnished them. Do you want to be trapped here like rats? There's no telling what they will do. They surrounded my storehouse, threatened violence and would have demolished the place had not my deputies thought to flash in the windows the huge posters bearing the price list which will go into effect on Monday. Then the mob turned and with a shout of 'Get the egg king,' stampeded down the street.

"I came here to warn you—it's more than you deserve, but I don't want to see violence done. Listen."

He rushed to the window and threw it open. In the distance came the roar of the mob, gathering in violence as the seconds flew.

"I have turned my deputies in to try to quell them—but there is no quelling that angry mob. They lust for destruction. Give your butler orders to get the servants out of the house and come yourselves. Don't wait to order your car. I have mine outside."

"The police—" Truxton began with

a movement toward the phone, but Karby stopped him.

"The police are powerless, forty of them tried to quell the mob before my place and failed."

A torrent of angry voices now burst upon the air. The sound brought action. Truxton, pale and with set lips, gave orders to the butler. Then Karby led them from the house to his machine, and piloted the same to a side street, where he drew up and bade them wait while he went forward to see what he could do.

Even as he started, the noise increased to Bedlam and he saw the advance guard of the mob closing in on the Truxton place. They paused before it and waited until their number was sufficiently augmented to begin violence.

Karby saw that he was cut off from his deputies. He stood there wondering what to do when a movement near him caused him to wheel about.

Miss Truxton stood there beside him.

"I came after you—I made them let me. Mr. Karby, I want you to know that I think you are white, as the saying goes, one of the whitest men I have ever heard of. Father is impressed by your actions—by your coming to warn us."

She shuddered and drew nearer to him as a perfect howl and shriek of rage ascended from the mob.

A patrol wagon clattered by and dumped a score or more of police who rushed at the mob, with a great flourish of clubs and pistols. But they were intimidated almost immediately and hadn't the courage to use firearms against this Bedlam of raving people. So they stood there, trying to awe the crowd by their uniforms, and shouting for them to disperse.

The shout was answered by cries of derision and hoots of laughter, and some one hurled a missile which crashed through one of the Truxton windows. In a second the house was bombarded with bricks and stones and clubs. The glass showered down like rain.

The girl clutched Karby's hand and

hid her face in his shoulder. He threw his arm about her and tried to murmur words of comfort.

At the same instant there came to him a great idea. He bade her follow him, rushed to a corner and turned in a fire alarm.

In a second it seemed the firebells were ringing and the apparatus could be heard in the distance, the gongs clanging ferociously. Karby went into the crowds and spoke a word or two to the police, who caught the idea immediately, withdrew to the street intersections, and when the fire apparatus drew up, ordered the firemen to attach the hose to the water-plugs. This was done in a minute, the firemen realizing instantly that the power of dispersing the angry mob lay in their hands.

The police gave the word and great streams of water came tearing from the nozzles with terrific force. These streams were turned directly on the mob.

The throng was stunned. A cry of rage went up. Those in the front ranks made a rush at the firemen, but the nearer they came the greater was the force of the water.

The leaders paused irresolute. At the same time another stream and then another and another were turned upon them. They were being soaked like drowning rats.

Still they stood their ground, too stunned and bewildered apparently to retreat. In another minute three more streams were deluging the crowd, and at a suggestion of Karby's these latter streams were directed over the heads of the nearest in an effort to reach the outskirts of the throngs. This did the work. As the water descended on the stragglers in the rear they gave way, thus making room for those in advance of them to retreat. At the same time the firemen rushed forward, wielding their hose with deadly accuracy.

Several men were knocked down by the force of the streams, and the women in the crowd broke and flew for shelter.

This was a signal to ply the water with greater agility, and the firemen followed up their advantage as the now bewildered mob gave way.

Presently the rioters broke helter-skelter, and in one mad plunge, turned and fled, getting away from the merciless torrents as best they could.

In another ten minutes the streets were clear.

Heloise Truxton drew close to Karby, and as they started back for the machine, she told him softly:

"I came to you to-day — because I knew my father—and his agents were going to recruit a mob—to try to demolish your great store. I made him promise to let me come—and make the proposition to buy your eggs. If you had agreed, there would have been no mob. I wanted to save you—even though I didn't know then who you were. I failed, and the mob was organized, and they turned against my father and would have burned us out—had it not been for you.

"We — father would have deserved it all, and yet you stood by us—warned us to flee and then helped us to get here—and it was your idea that brought the firemen, oh, you are splendid, Mr. Karby, just splendid."

"Not splendid," Karby told her. "I warned your people not because of any idea of returning good for evil, but because of you. I wanted to save you. That's why I did it."

He stopped her in the darkness of some trees and faced her.

"Do you understand that?" he said. He took her by the hands and looked

into her eyes. "It was for you. I would have gone through fire to save you."

She swayed toward him. Karby never knew just how it happened, but the next instant she was in his arms, and he was holding her tight. Her face was upturned to him, and on a sudden he stooped and kissed her.

Her lips were not unresponsive, but yielded with a warmth that thrilled him to the soul. He murmured words to her which were for her ear alone, and her arms came up and tightened about his neck.

And then the city rocked with the roar of an explosion that made the very ground beneath Karby and the girl tremble. The concussion was awful.

Karby disengaged her—held her at arms' length and stared in the direction of his store. There came a faint illumination from that point, and then the heavens flamed with a deep red glare, and Karby saw tongues of fire shooting up and up and up and gaining ground as the seconds went by.

He lowered his head and stood there, a picture of dejection, despair. The girl threw her arms about his neck and asked him what it was—said she was afraid.

But Karby stared down into her eyes. "It's all right, Miss Truxton. I've got you—and I'm going to keep you—marry you. But your father has won. I withdrew my deputies to help fight this mob. Your father's agents got in their work. That explosion came from my store. They have fired it. He wins. His corner in eggs is safe. The people lose. I'm sorry."

What Happened Below



by Hawthorne Daniel

EGAN wiped the sweat from his forehead with a muscular forearm.

He stood for a moment gazing at the glaring blaze of one of his furnaces and mumbled something to himself. Then he turned and resumed his toil.

"I ain't got any nerve," he muttered as he swung his filled scoop up to the furnace door, scattering the coal over the fire. "I ain't got any nerve."

He shoveled fiercely for a minute and slammed the door. Then he straightened up and leaned against his shovel.

"And everybody on the ship knows it, too," he added.

A vivid picture of the shameful scene of an hour before came to him. Why had he not fought when Fisher gave him the lie before the others on the pier?

"That's it," he mumbled; "I ain't got any nerve." He paused and narrowed his eyes. "But I'll show 'em yet."

Egan was one of a dozen stokers on the *Ardmore*, a small, dirty British steamer loading at a dock in Brooklyn for Liverpool. Already the ship was filled until the little white circle placed by Lloyd's on her streaked side was splashed by every wave.

The big tarpaulins were being unrolled over the hatches by a group of deckhands, and a man was taking down the metal disks that kept the rats from journeying over the cables that led to the

pier. The second engineer had finished his inspection of the engines, and was watching the steady rise of pressure in the steam-gages on the big boilers, under which the stokers were stirring up the fires. They were all but ready to start to sea.

The stokers not on duty had been given the day ashore, and had taken advantage of it in the old-fashioned sailor way. Every one of them had returned with more stimulants under his belt than were good for him.

Egan had been with the bunch, but had taken less than the others—not because he wanted less, but because he knew that if he took any more before going to work in the overheated stoke-hole it would go to his head, and he would have to be carried out. That might lose him his berth.

The rough crowd had made a day of it, a day to remember. They spent all of their money and most of their energy.

They were peaceable enough until their feet touched the splintered planks of the pier. Then they could not resist a little rough play before going aboard.

They pushed each other awkwardly about as they tramped gaily down the pier. In the horse-play Egan was shoved forcibly, and fell over a cable that lay stretched across his path. He hurt himself just enough to make him angry.

"You're drunk!" shouted Fisher. Egan rose to his feet. "You're drunk!"

"I ain't drunk," returned the angry Egan.

"You are," insisted Fisher. "You're drunker 'n a fool."

"I ain't," growled Egan. "I only had two drinks."

"You lie!" yelled Fisher aggressively, holding his muscular elbows out from his body. "You had a dozen."

Egan turned. The others of the party cleared away from the pair, expecting what was to them the logical outcome of so gross an insult.

To their utter amazement Egan only glared at Fisher—only stared him in the eye for a moment. Then he quailed before the smaller man and boarded the ship without a word.

"Quitter!" some one shouted, and the others jeered. Fisher guffawed loudly in his drunken glee.

Egan went to the forecabin, changed his clothes, and was ready before the others of his shift. They said nothing when they came up. They only poked each other and grinned. Their shift was called, and they slid down the slippery ladders into the black pit to feed the furnaces.

The engine-room bell jingled, and the engines started. When Egan climbed to the deck after his watch below, the ship was gliding through the Narrows, flying a row of flags from her signal halyard.

A ragged smudge drifted from the big funnel toward the Staten Island shore, almost blotting out a battle-ship that lay anchored there. Egan stood by the rail for a minute. Then he went forward to wash up.

Regularly he took his shift, and regularly he came on deck after the grinding toil to stand by the rail for a minute. Always his thoughts for that minute were the same: "How can I show 'em I ain't a quitter?"

In the sixteen days that followed, no one spoke to him except when it was necessary. He grew sullen, and deliber-

ately kept away from the others. He fretted over it, and could think of no way to reinstate himself in the good graces of his fellows.

The ship was nearing the end of the voyage. The skipper checked their position on a chart and called the engineer. They talked quietly for a minute. The engineer nodded and returned to the engine-room.

He gave an order, and the sweating stokers worked furiously in the dim light of the dingy pit. They watched their fires carefully. They shoveled and poked and shoveled again. They worked like slaves, and the quivering hands on the pressure-gage gradually rose.

Five pounds, ten pounds, and the pop valve on Egan's boiler opened. It hissed malevolently for a moment and closed. The shovels clanged against the furnace doors and scraped under the piles of coal.

Then one of the stokers collapsed. He was carried to a ventilator, and another stoker was called. He dropped down the ladder and took his place.

At first Egan did not notice who had come. Then, as a furnace door was thrown open, the glare lit up the heavy body and bullet head of Fisher working at the next fire.

Egan said nothing. He only worked harder.

The furnaces roared. The gage-hands quivered on the dials. The men worked furiously, expending every effort. Fisher dripped sweat and panted as he shoveled. The men looked like goblins in the glare and heat. The old steamer plowed through the sea with more foam before her nose than she had ever raised before.

The captain was smiling as he stood on the bridge. The engineer was leaning against a polished rail in the engine-room. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a plug of tobacco, bit it, and thought of the baby he would see in its mother's arms when they docked at Liverpool in the morning. Everything was running smoothly.

Egan closed the door of a furnace with

a slam. He straightened up to rest his aching back. He threw back his shoulders, and as he did so a tremendous explosion shook the ship.

Her bow lifted high into the air. The stokers in the grimy pit slid scrambling across the tilted metal deck, straight for the heated fronts of the furnaces. Egan thrust out his shovel and saved himself.

He reached out with one long arm and grasped Fisher just as the man was about to fall against the hot metal.

The ship rolled back, and the stokers made a dash for the ladder. The trimmers darted from the bunkers, and in a mad, fighting group they tried to force their way to the only escape.

Egan's heart was pounding rapidly. For a moment he almost joined the rush. Then he saw a stream of dirty water trickle through a crack in the bulkhead.

He thought of the boilers that would explode if the water reached them. With a leap he reached the frightened men at the foot of the ladder. He flung them aside and stood with his back to the only escape from the pit.

"Get back!" he shouted. "Get back an' pull your fires!"

They pushed toward him. Fisher made a leap for the ladder. Egan struck him in mid air with his powerful fist. He crumpled up and sprawled out on the floor. The others crowded forward, terror showing in their eyes.

Egan swung his arms like flails, battering their flesh as they advanced. In their fear they made no effort to return his blows. They halted, staring wide-eyed at the demon in front of them.

He advanced a step.

"Pull them fires!" he bellowed, shaking his huge fists in the air. "Pull 'em, damn you, pull 'em!"

Keeping a wary eye on every man before him, Egan reached for his long-handled rake. He pushed the unconscious Fisher aside with his foot.

For a moment the others watched him, sheeplike. One started suddenly for the ladder. Egan stepped back and struck

him. The man staggered, his mouth bleeding. He looked at Egan for an instant. Then he turned and opened the furnace doors. The others did the same.

The burning coals tumbled from the grates and hissed into the water that washed about the floor. It grew deeper forward. Egan paused for a moment to haul the still unconscious Fisher onto a pile of coal.

The fires were piled, and still the men hesitated. Steam was filling the dingy place. The water continued to rise. Fumes from the coals on the floor all but strangled the men.

"Break the water-gages!" roared Egan.

Groping in the darkening pit the men reached for shovels and rakes. They broke the glass gages. Steam and scalding water poured into the place.

"Now beat it!" shouted Egan.

The men swarmed rapidly up the ladder. Egan waited until they disappeared in the steam. The water had risen to his knees.

He strode through it to the pile of coal on which lay Fisher, moaning now amid the choking fumes and steam. Egan picked him up. The electric lights suddenly went out. The inrush of water had lessened, but the steam was awful.

Egan gasped for air and splashed through the blackness. He groped for the ladder in the dark. For a moment he could not find it.

A terrible fear gripped him. Then his outstretched hand grasped a rung. With Fisher on his shoulder he started to climb.

He tried to hold his breath against the gases and the steam. He reached a landing, gasping, and fell against another ladder. This he clutched and climbed again.

Sunlight streamed through a companionway. Wearily he walked out onto the listed deck and let Fisher slip gently from his shoulder. He saw a British destroyer standing by, its thin bow twisted.

"She rammed 'em," said some one beside him. "That's where they went down."

Egan looked and saw, a little distance

off, a large, uneven stain upon the water. It was oil. Rapidly it grew larger, and from beneath it a steady stream of bubbles wobbled slowly to the surface and broke.

Egan leaned against the rail, and with his mind's eye saw a ghastly struggle against violent death far down beneath the quiet water, where the crushed submarine was sending up its dying gasps with each bubble that broke on the surface.

"How much water's in the hold?" de-

manded the captain of no one in particular.

"Not very much, sir," answered Egan in a funny little voice. "And the fires are pulled. I don't believe we'll sink, sir."

He leaned weakly against the rail. He heard some one tell the captain of the fight in the stokehole. He listened and a tired smile crept over his face.

"Well," he muttered to himself, "I showed 'em; but, my Gawd, I was scared."

PHYLLIS ON A PULLMAN

'TWAS on a bounding Pullman car
That, like a vision from afar
In matchless beauty—tress of gold
And eyes to turn the arctic cold
To tropic shimmer with their glance
And ways suggesting song and dance—
She dawned and held me 'neath a spell
No words can adequately tell—
But oh, good Lord!
When evening fell, my, how she snored!

The cries of Indians lifting scalps!
The avalanches of the Alps!
The roar of cannon and of shot!
The echoes of some mammoth grot!
The scream of sea-gulls in their flight!
The song of tree-toads in the night!
The *oompah* of the big bassoon!
The honk of some impending loon—
All got aboard,
And swelled the tune that Phyllis snored!

Mozart and Verdi—both were there,
And hints of Wagner filled the air:
And every dissonance in life
Was added to the nasal strife
That permeated near and far
Each nook and cranny of the car,
And made me feel as if I trod
Some battle-field's encrimsoned sod
Where nations warred
Steel-armed and shod, as on she snored!

Oh, Maxim great, or Edison—
It matters not to me which one—
Wilt thou not take this chance in mind
And for the good of all mankind
Some day from out thy genius rare
Devise an instrument with care—
A sort of nasal silencer—
To still the tumult and the whirl
That wholly floored
My heart when lovely Phyllis snored?

John Kendrick Bangs

The Jackal's Mighty Roar



by Lenivers Carew

"THE people all around here are keyed up to quite a pitch of excitement."

George Eastman had just come back from the quaint little general store of the tropical seaside town, bearing a can of petrol for a road-car in which he and his wife were touring the French island colony.

"It's all over the home-coming of a famous criminal and outlaw—a man named Victor Berard," continued Eastman, as he prepared to feed the volatile fluid to the hungry machine. "He has been doing a ten-year term in the penal colony of New Caledonia, and is such a desperate character that his return to the islands fills the natives with a dread which they seem to find almost delightful.

"Berard, it seems, is singularly savage and ferocious, and has the most amazing courage—a dead-shot with rifle and pistol, and a terrible artist with the knife. These people are absolutely ecstatic over the prospect of being slaughtered in their houses as soon as he returns to resume his depredations. I could hardly persuade them to sell me the petrol, there was such a buzz of gossip in the store!"

"We'd better put our car on the first ship that's leaving and get away from here before the terror begins," said Louise Eastman, with a nervous little laugh. "I don't think I'd care for the tropical variety of *Robin Hood*."

"I fancy that Victor Berard is a sort of island tradition," sniffed her husband with a shrug. "These emotional people cherish their 'bad men,' you know, and paint them and their escapades in vivid colors. Don't worry about it; the return of Berard will add another note of romance to the tales we shall hear."

"The sublime extravagance of going half-way round the world by motor will come near enough to ruining us, George," said his wife, "without having a distinguished bandit capture and hold us for ransom."

"I am already disappointed in our distinguished bandit," chuckled Eastman. "He would have had something more than ten years at hard labor if he had done anything splendidly devilish. I'm afraid that sober analysis will narrow his depredations down to sheep stealing, or something sordid like that. We may as well forget him and go about our business.

"I managed to extract a few bits of in-

formation there at the store, in spite of the breathless chatter about the bandit. There's a tiny, primitive, but highly respectable inn about half-way down the south shore of the island, and it will apparently do very well for our dinner and night's lodging. The innkeeper's wife speaks and cooks in French, Spanish, and English, and the man himself sells supplies for motor-cars in at least two languages."

With a pleasant prospect of a savory meal and decent lodging on the shore of a lately savage island, they motored along the sandy beach road, glistening with shells of pearl and amber and opal hues, and lapped soothingly by the gentle, sapphire sea. In place of the cawing crows of the travelers' home cornfields, green and scarlet parrots screamed in the tops of the coconut-palms, and the small animals that scrambled among the branches were monkeys, not squirrels.

Proceeding at a leisurely speed, to miss nothing of the novel scenery, they came, toward sundown, to the inn that had been described. It was a mere cottage of coral slabs and palm thatch, but clean and pleasantly harmonious with the landscape.

In the driveway that led to the house, a vagrant nail—perhaps one of many—pierced the shoe and tube of a front tire, and the loud pop of the "blowout" brought Monsieur Tournier forth with suspicious alacrity and eager offers of a new tube and skilful patching of the shoe.

It was evident, Eastman whispered to his wife, that the traditional thrift of the French peasant was not affected by the languor of the tropical trade winds. It was clearly necessary, however, for the host to keep an eye to the main chance—even to the sprinkling of the road with nails—for it was the off-season for tourists and the four guest-rooms of the inn were vacant when the Americans arrived.

"We heard in the town of the sensational return of your island hero and villain, Victor Berard," Eastman remarked to Mme. Tournier, as she served

the guests with a delectable combination of herbs and sea food and a handsomely turned omelet.

"*Ma foi*, yes; it is terrible, *monsieur!*" exclaimed the woman with an elaborate shudder. "Ten years, you see, we have had peace without that apache; he should more better have been sent to the galleys for life, I think. Now he comes again!"

"Is he really so horrible?" Mrs. Eastman inquired. "Or do the people fear for their chicken-roosts and gardens?"

Mme. Tournier sighed profoundly.

"*Helas!*" she wailed. "If Victor Berard desired a chicken, it is not that he would visit the chicken-coop—he would come to my door and order that the chicken should be cooked for him, *aux champignons, sauce piquante!* No, *madame*, it is no joke. Victor Berard is a terrible fellow. He desires some money! Does he rob a man of his purse? No, he goes to the town and demands the money of a hundred men—he would fear a thousand no more! In the street full of people, Victor Berard speaks, and all the men—they stop and grow pale. Ah, he is the devil!"

"When Victor Berard shoot the pistol," supplemented M. Tournier, standing by his wife, "always a man die—the bullet is in his heart. When he flash the knife, already a man lie dead in blood! But when some man he shoot Victor Berard—poof! Berard, he is not dead; he shake himself like the bull, or the lion—he is all right!"

"Ten years at hard labor will have sobered him a bit, perhaps," suggested Eastman.

"Nevair!" declared the Frenchman with grim conviction. "Does the tiger grow tame in the cage, *monsieur?* Victor Berard, he will now seek his revenge upon the whole world. He will demand much money from us all, and—we must pay or die!"

"But you have police service here in the islands, *monsieur!*" exclaimed Mrs. Eastman.

The innkeeper shut one eye mysteriously and put his tongue in his cheek.

"Victor Berard have many friends, *madame*," he said pointedly. "It was an officer of the police who was killed that Victor had to go away to prison—but it was for ten years only, because the officer had fired his pistol first. Many men had died before, but always it was that Victor fired his shot in self-defense, you see? Some of his good friends were very large men in the colony, and that makes the difference."

The evening meal was finished with sweet pancakes, cheese, and coffee, and after that the guests sat in the large general room and were regaled by their hosts with marvelous tales of the desperate escapades and achievements of the celebrated outlaw.

A little later the innkeeper excused himself to set about the repairing of the motor-car's tires against the early-morning departure of the guests, and Mme. Tournier took upon herself the burden of the entertainment.

"I adore stories of adventure, Mme. Tournier," said Mrs. Eastman; "but I don't know how well I shall sleep to-night. I hope that your desperado's ship will not arrive until we are well away from the islands."

"Ah, but it was to arrive in port to-day," the woman assured her unfeelingly. "Victor Berard, he may be already engaged in evil adventures!"

"Then, for mercy's sake, let us talk of the scenery and other pleasant things for the rest of the evening," begged the lady, affecting an air of terror.

A man was heard walking along the hard shell road.

"Hola!" he cried loudly, halting before the inn, and M. Tournier hurried out to meet him.

"*Bon soir, M. et Mme. Tournier!*" thundered the stranger.

The innkeeper fell back a pace and stared through the starlit gloom.

"Victor Berard!" he almost yelled, in mingled consternation and surprise.

Mme. Tournier, with even less restraint, emitted a shriek.

The two Americans sat breathless with amazement and a vague sort of expectancy as the celebrated outlaw swaggered into the room.

"The welcome you give me, old friends," said the returned convict harshly, "is noisy, even if it lacks warmth. Come, show some joy at my return. Bring me at once a bottle of that Beaujolais of eighteen-ninety-six, friend Tournier."

He threw himself luxuriously into a chair near the American visitors, then peered at the latter curiously, and waved them a bluff greeting.

"Distinguished travelers from Europe or America, I see!" he exclaimed boldly. "I am honored by such company. Tournier, the visitors will join me in three bottles of the Beaujolais."

"A thousand thanks, *monsieur!*" exclaimed George Eastman; "but *madame* and I have finished our dinner and we shall soon retire, to rest after a day of fatigue."

"I am Victor Berard!" the man announced belligerently. "You know? When I offer entertainment, it is not refused, *monsieur!*"

"We will wait to take just one glass of the wine with M. Berard," said Mrs. Eastman in a conciliatory but rather tremulous voice.

"*Madame* is as gracious as she is beautiful!" exclaimed the outlaw with an insolent grin.

He turned and peered sharply at the innkeeper, as the latter obediently brought in the bottles of wine.

"Friend Tournier," he said, "I have returned to my beloved islands with empty pockets. I am unhappily forced to trouble you for assistance at once. I need twenty-five thousand francs."

Tournier deposited the bottles on the table with a thud and began to tremble with an ague of terror.

"Have mercy, M. Berard!" he cried brokenly. "You should know well that

I have not a quarter of so much money in all the world, and that to give you even a thousand francs would ruin me!"

Mme. Tournier threw her apron over her head and burst into dismal wails, rocking her body backward and forward, and wringing her hands.

"I shall quickly learn for myself how much you have, Tournier," declared the bandit. "You know how gently I deal with liars!"

Tournier whimpered and his wife sprang to her feet and howled incoherently for mercy.

"I am not easily moved by a woman's tears, Mme. Tournier," said Berard impatiently; "much less when they are shed in cloudbursts to the accompaniment of such devilish howling. Be quiet, now, or your sniveling husband shall be made to gag you."

"By all the saints, M. Berard!" cried the innkeeper brokenly, "I am speaking to you with truth and honesty. Would you, then, ruin a poor dog who has worked so hard for the little he has?"

"We shall see how far the poor dog shall be ruined," muttered the outlaw, settling back comfortably in his chair. "It occurs to me, friends, that travelers from distant lands must be well furnished with money. Come now, we shall see that my desperate need has already touched the generous hearts of this lovely lady and her gallant husband. They will come to your relief, Tournier. May it not be that, in their liberality, they will endow me with—ah!—not a mere twenty-five thousand, but with fifty thousand francs. It will be beautiful—sublime! Yes, yes; that is an end to all my pressing problems of the moment!"

"I fear that you jest rather broadly, *monsieur*," Eastman said quietly. "I am not unwilling to help a fellow traveler on his way with a few francs from my pocket; but my wife and I are spending even more than we can well afford on our travels, and we are not wealthy persons by any means. Americans are protected by their government at home, you know,

from such dangers as capture for ransom and blackmail. Any unpleasantness you might be rash enough to cause us would quickly grow into an international affair. That would mean too much publicity for you, you see, and you would hardly get off with ten years in New Caledonia. You are a man of evident intelligence, M. Berard, and I think I make myself clear."

The outlaw sprawled over the table and leered at the American.

"Fifty thousand francs!" he said, with emphasis upon each word. "The money must be paid at once or I shall lose patience. Let us, then, have no more foolish talk!"

"If it is not paid?" Eastman queried, meeting the man's ugly glance unflinchingly.

Berard took a sip of wine, then languidly drew from his pocket a huge navy revolver, which he placed beside him on the table with elaborate care.

"Why, then," he said at last, "if the money is not paid, the affair will become melancholy—tragic! The lovely *madame* will suddenly become a lovely widow, and I shall have the honor of being her escort upon her travels. It is too simple to need more explanation, *monsieur*."

"Look here!"—a note of deep concern sounded in Eastman's voice as he saw his wife's face blanch—"I refuse to take this outrageous affair seriously. You are not a fool; you must know what a row you would kick up by making any trouble for us. The world is too small for such villainy as you suggest, M. Berard. As a matter of fact, if the lives of both myself and my wife were actually at stake, we could not in any way raise such a sum as fifty thousand francs—particularly in this part of the earth."

"Make me an offer," drawled Berard with the suavity of a tradesman.

"Great Heavens! I'm not haggling with you!" cried Eastman angrily. "I haven't the slightest thought of being in danger—from *you*, and I wouldn't give you a sou! You're an impudent swash-buckler; you've played upon the ignorant

fears of the natives here, and you've got an exaggerated idea of your importance. I don't care a snap of the fingers for you or for your threats!

"Come, Lou," he added to his trembling wife, "we'll go to our room, and to-morrow I'll see the proper authorities about the outrageous actions of this bully."

"Have a care, *monsieur*!" spoke up the innkeeper in a shaking voice. "Believe me, you do not know half the evil that M. Berard is capable of. You are a braver man than I, *monsieur*, but you will pay a great price for your defiance. I speak as a friend."

Victor Berard took the big revolver from the table, and his thick, stubby forefinger crooked indolently around the trigger.

"You talk like an American and a fool!" he said to Eastman harshly. "Do not try to leave the room. If you reach the door, *monsieur*, it will be as a dead man, stretched across the threshold. Your wife will then have the choice of going with me or of dying; I do not permit women to worry me. I will have money—to-night—or you cannot live until the morning!"

"You are weaving a terrible net around yourself, Berard!" declared Eastman tensely, and his face had grown as white as that of his wife. "You can gain nothing from this folly but a return to prison. With my traveler's letter of credit, and all the credentials that I have, I could not raise more than five thousand francs at the American consul's office. And even so, I would not give you the smallest part of that. Now, think well of what you are doing!"

"Go to the American consul now," ordered the outlaw, "and bring me the five thousand francs! I will take that—and we shall see what will come later. Your wife will remain here, and I shall wait two hours for you to make the journey in your motor. Yes, I will be gracious; I will take the five thousand francs."

"I believe you are insane," said East-

man. "Do you think that if I went to the consul's office I would not return directly with police, with French marines—with all the authority that I could get back of me? Your frank assurance is ridiculous!"

"Not at all, *monsieur*!" replied the outlaw blandly. "I am not a child. Of a certainty, you could get the police—a company of marines, if you wished. But—it would be a sorrow for you, *monsieur*, to find your beautiful wife with her throat cut when you arrived with your police. Is it not so? While you are gone, *madame* will sit here, and my pistol will point at her heart. When you return to this room I shall know instantly whether *madame* is to live or to die. I can shoot very quickly, *monsieur*."

"Ha, ha! You see it now!" he went on, chuckling. "Myself, I take no chances. With a man alone, it would be different; but with the lovely lady as a forfeit, I have no fears. Now go!"

Mrs. Eastman spoke suddenly in a despairing wail.

"Give him all we have, George," she said. "The man is a savage! How can we expect reason or mercy from him?"

"*Madame* is endowed with brains as well as beauty!" exclaimed the outlaw. "It would be a thousand pities to spoil such beauty, or to spill such excellent brains. Do not delay, *monsieur*!"

George Eastman stood with clenched hands, his face working convulsively.

"You are the first man I have ever wanted to kill!" he declared.

The outlaw shrugged his shoulders.

"Myself, I have no fierce emotions like that," he said virtuously. "I should like to avoid killing you, *monsieur*. No, it would not be pleasant to kill either you or *madame*!"

Eastman looked at his wife long and earnestly. His eyes blazed with hot anger and resentment, and he longed to attack the desperado and take his chances, but the piteous, hopeless face of the frail woman unnerved him.

"Well, then," he said suddenly, with a

sigh of bitter dejection, "I'll go! But I warn you, Berard, that if I give you the money, it will not be an end of the affair."

"Get the money and make haste," muttered the outlaw, grinning contentedly.

"It is terrible, M. Eastman, that such a crime should be committed in my house," moaned Tournier; "but you are wise to yield before there is bloodshed! We know this man, and he has no mercy."

"You see what my dear friends say of me!" exclaimed the outlaw happily.

The American, ignoring the brute and his gun, went to his wife and took her in his arms. He whispered encouragement of a sort to her, and begged her to be brave and patient in the ordeal while he went to the town and talked with the United States consul. It might be, he told her boldly, that a way would be found to circumvent the scoundrel without risking danger or disaster.

"I am a quick shot, and a sure one," warned Berard. "Be sure that I will keep my word."

Eastman embraced his wife tenderly, then sprang away from her and walked to the door.

"I shall be back in an hour, if it is possible," he said quietly.

"If the hour stretches out too far," said Berard, "I shall take *madame* in my arms and console her. I find myself already growing foolish with tender emotions."

"Take care that I don't kill you!" cried Eastman, and stepped forth resolutely into the night.

Without help from Tournier, he got his car from the shed at the rear of the inn, made certain that the engine and the tires were in working order, and then started at high speed for the distant town, his heart beating faster than the valves of the motor.

It was late in the evening, and the consul might be hard to find. What then? And if he was in his office, could he cash the letters of credit without infinite com-

ing and going and hours of delay? With the money secured and paid to the bandit, what would the travelers do then, without means, and so many thousand miles from home?

Thus his mind ran on in a turmoil of apprehension and excitement, and he drove the motor-car over the hard, white road at prodigious speed.

Suddenly the throbbing rataplan of the engine stopped, and the car coasted for a thousand yards under the impetus of its speed, then slowed down and stopped.

Eastman sprang out and threw open the hood in a frenzy of anxiety. There was a tense moment of inspection, then the man cried out and shouted at the car as though it were a living creature. It might run again after an hour or two of laborious tinkering, but in the present emergency it would not move for any man.

He shrieked madly at the thing to have mercy on him and rally to his need, but the machinery remained stolidly inert with a sort of grim fatality.

He heard, all at once, far off, the faint sound of wheels and a drumming of hoofs, and he cried out in wild expectancy. Unable to wait, he ran swiftly down the road to meet the approaching vehicle; and when he was panting for breath and almost exhausted, he came upon a two-wheeled native cart, pony drawn, and occupied by a single man.

He tried English words upon the wayfarer, and there was an encouraging response.

"Turn your cart around and take me to the town, and make your price what you will!" he gasped as soon as he could breathe.

"But, *monsieur*, it is very late, and my own destination is far off," the driver protested courteously.

Eastman explained frantically that he was the victim of a treacherous motor, and that he must get to the town.

"You will do well to wait until morning, it is now so late," advised the stranger. "There is a good inn some distance

along the road, and I will take you there."

"But I came from that accursed place just now!" cried the American. "I tell you, sir, it is a matter of life and death, and you must take me to the town!"

"Ah, some person is very ill?" murmured the driver. "Then that is different. But there is an English doctor here on the road; I will take you to his house."

"Must I tell you everything?" groaned Eastman, beside himself. "I have to see the United States consul; I have to get money—at once!—money to save the life of my wife. Is that enough for your curiosity?"

"*Monsieur* is excited!" observed the other with maddening ease of manner. "But you give me a mystery to puzzle over, my friend. It is very strange—that *madame*, your wife, her life may be saved by—money! The situation is peculiar!"

Eastman swore at the man; he assailed him with frightful epithets and dire threats, but scarcely disturbed his equanimity.

"But if you must have the whole story, why, have it then!" he stormed. "I intend that the world shall have it tomorrow, so what's the difference? I—my poor wife and I—are the victims of your precious island's hero—Victor Berard!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the man blandly. "Continue, *monsieur*, if you please."

"The beast returned from ten years' imprisonment to-day, as you doubtless know," Eastman hurried on, "and he selected us as the first victims of his new career of crime. My wife is half dead with fright. He holds her prisoner at the inn, ready to kill her if I do not bring the money—do you see? If I summon the police he will kill her, and if I fail to get the money he may kill us both. Now, will you take me to the house of the consul?"

The driver appeared vastly interested, but scarcely perturbed.

"*Monsieur* has had no previous expe-

rience with bandits!" he exclaimed. "But that is not strange at this day; they are not so common. *Eh bien, monsieur*; you will permit me to help you as a friend? Be good enough to get up here beside me. We will drive to the inn."

"The devil we will!" cried Eastman, aghast. "Man alive, that will do no good; it may be fatal!"

"Have the goodness to follow my advice," persisted the stranger. "I will talk to this Victor Berard, and show him clearly the folly of his actions. He will listen to me; I promise you on my oath, *monsieur*."

"He will shoot you dead!" declared the American.

The man shrugged his shoulders and threw back the front of his jacket, exposing to view the butt of a revolver that hung in a holster at his waist.

"We shall meet on even terms, *monsieur*," he said quietly.

Vaguely bewildered and exhausted by his prolonged frenzy, Eastman mounted to the seat of the cart reluctantly. He started a fresh series of objections to the man's proposals, but the native cut him short by starting the pony abruptly and whipping it into a wild run, flinging the cart sickeningly from one side of the road to the other.

Eastman clung to the sides and kept his seat with difficulty, and the jolting of the vehicle precluded further argument.

As they drew near the inn, the driver pulled the pony to an easy trot, but he made no further attempt to diminish the sounds of their approach.

"Be good enough to get down here, *monsieur*," he said presently, "that I may appear to be alone if I am observed. When I reach the door and enter, you may follow quickly."

Eastman dropped to the ground a hundred yards from the house, in deep shadow, and waited. He was dumbly obedient now, for there was a certain authority in the man's speech and actions which reassured him and gave him something like hope.

He watched his mysterious friend as he drove up to the inn and got down from the cart. He saw him casually tie the horse to a post and saunter up to the door; then he followed directions and scurried forward, keeping in the shadows.

When he reached the door it was open, and there were loud voices sounding from the room. In a flash he saw his friend engaged with the terrible Victor Berard, and he darted into the room and seized his sobbing wife in his arms.

The cart-driver held the outlaw by the collar of his shirt with one hand, and with the other hand he dealt him prodigious blows across the face. Crimson welts appeared where the hand rose and fell, and between howls of agony the famous outlaw shrieked that his nose was broken.

"This is the beginning!" announced the stranger, desisting for a moment. "Also it is a punishment too mild. Attend to what I say! You have frightened a lady to distraction; you have disturbed a gentleman traveling in a strange land, and you have masqueraded as a better man! What punishment is appropriate, then?"

"You mean that this fellow is not Victor Berard!" cried out Eastman, bewildered and incredulous.

The stranger stepped back, struck an attitude, and pointed at the moaning outlaw derisively.

"Victor Berard," he said dramatically, "has been described as a handsome man! Would any one but the unfortunate mother of this goat call him handsome?"

"Victor Berard's enemies call him brave!" he went on oratorically. "Could any one mistake this whimpering booby for a brave man?"

"Victor Berard was outlawed and sent into exile; but when did he prey upon travelers and upon frail women? Victor Berard, believe me, might throw the palace of a prince into panic, but he would not seek adventure in the parlor of an inn!"

Eastman, utterly aghast, glanced cu-

riously at Tournier and his wife, and was further puzzled. The keepers of the inn were apparently quite as terrified as they had been before; their faces were drawn, and of the color of yellowed ivory. They shrank back together close to the wall and stared at the stranger in a sort of fascination.

"Now," resumed the person of mysterious authority, "we shall get this *canaille* out of our atmosphere!" and he grasped the culprit again by the collar and flung him upon the floor.

"Mercy! Have mercy, *monsieur!*" pleaded the wretch who had lately swagged so recklessly.

"I will spare your life—if I do not meet you again," said the stranger. "A ship leaves the island to-morrow see to it that your departure is simultaneous with hers. This island is my home; I do not wish that travelers should find such rats as you upon it!"

The cringing clown, whimpering softly, crept furtively toward the open door. He gained the threshold and rose to something nearer a standing posture, and then the stranger took a long stride after him and administered the world's record kick, propelling him like a rocket through the darkness.

At the same moment the administrator of picturesque justice whipped the revolver from his belt and fired a fusillade of shots into the air at random.

They heard the terrified clown running on the road a moment later—running, perhaps, as athletes sometimes dream of running.

"Now you, M. and Mme. Tournier!" thundered the stranger, turning suddenly upon the innkeepers with a face dark with wrath.

"But why—" began Eastman.

"These old foxes also must leave my island," said the stranger. "The rat who masqueraded as a man is their precious son, and he was but playing out their shrewd scheme to wring money from credulous travelers."

"Have pity, *monsieur!*" wailed the

woman. "We shall starve; we have nothing if we leave here!"

"Out with you!" commanded the avenger. "See that you take the ship to-morrow. To-night you shall walk to the town. *Monsieur* and *madame*, the American travelers, shall sleep in peace, and I will keep the inn."

"You have indeed saved us from a ridiculous but a horrible adventure,

monsieur!" said George Eastman, stepping forward with outstretched hand. "My wife and I will never be able to express our gratitude. Whom have we the honor—"

The stranger interrupted him with an elaborate bow of studied grace.

"The honor is mine, *monsieur* and *madame*—to be your humble servant, Victor Berard," he said.

THE FOOL

THE Prince sat on his carved throne,
And wine from gold he quaffed;
The Seer, in drear, dull monotone,
Read of his saga-craft;
The Bard stood near, musing alone,
Watching the breezes waft
The rose-leaves through the window on
The Fool, who sang, and laughed:

"To you, O Prince, the power of lord—
That force almost divine
Of right of might and law of sword
And rule of fear malign,
That wait but for your spoken word,
Nor need another sign!

"Ah, Seer, you know the meaning cast
In word of book or pen,
You ken the tale of ages past,
Before the time of men—
And segregate from first to last
Nebulous 'Why' and 'When.'

"Yours, Bard, the song of youth's heart-blood,
The lilt of light sunbeams;
The May-time bloom of spring-quickened bud,
The soft night-hush of streams;
Young Love's ideal and Passion's flood,
Th' esotery of dreams!

"I am no king, yet rule the door
Of Laughter, Song, and Tears;
I cannot read, but yet know more—
Life's heart, its hopes, its fears;
I rime but lyrics of the lore
That strengthens hearts and cheers!

L'ENVOI

"Prince, when the Last Long Night is Dark,
Whom are ye then to rule?
And Seer, of what import the spark
Of wisdom from the school?
You, Bard, how can ye laud the Lark
When those hot lips are cool?
I trow, when we the Summons hark,
I'd rather be the Fool!"

Raymond T. Ashley



The Log=Book

By the Editor

I FRANKLY admit that a rule of THE ARGOSY is transgressed in the opening paragraph of the July complete novel. The story does not start off with a bang, this in spite of the fact that it leads our Fourth of July number. Nevertheless, there is a bang, and it comes ahead of the first paragraph. You get it in the title—

“McPHEE’S SENSATIONAL REST”

BY GEORGE FOXHALL

Author of “Those Eyes from Karna,” “Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street,” etc.

and you get it good and plenty in the story itself, which is all about a distinguished young novelist, seeking a change from work, and a persistent woman, who lands him in the midst of happenings beside which war’s wild alarms are almost tame. “McPhee’s Sensational Rest,” in short, moves with the rapidity of a machine gun, leaving the reader fairly breathless at the finish.

For those of you who like out-of-the-ordinary tales, the July number will provide

“JIMMIE BARTLETT’S BARGAIN”

BY H. L. JOHNSTON

in which a trade between rich and poor leads to extraordinary complications. “The Empress of the Paper Hoops,” by Olin Lyman, is a Fourth of July yarn with a circusy flavor, and what happens when patriotism runs counter to the call of love is set forth in

“FOR THE SAME FLAG”

BY NEIL MORAN

There are many other rarely attractive features in the July ARGOSY, but there’s a big mail from my readers awaiting attention, so I’ll now step aside myself and let you talk to one another.

FINDING BALM FOR FACT IN FICTION

I wonder if you all aren’t as pleased as I am when answers are made to my request to be told how each one came to know THE ARGOSY. Drop me a line about this. Meanwhile, here’s a new fashion in which a fellow became ac-

quainted with a publication that was destined to give him a great deal of pleasure.

Kingman, Arizona.

I have just laid down the March ARGOSY, and wish to say that the February and March issues have been exceptionally enjoyed. “Four-Forty at the Fort Penn” was a good story,

which, I believe, I enjoyed more than "One-Cylinder Sam," and that is saying a great deal. Most magazines improve gradually, but *THE ARGOSY* seems to come forward by leaps and bounds.

I note that you request in the Log-Book that we relate what it was that first attracted us to *THE ARGOSY*. In my case it was more of a case of sympathy than anything else. In the spring of 1908 I was stranded in a small town in Tennessee, and happening to pass a news-stand and noting *THE ARGOSY* story, "Up Against It," I felt that if the fellow who wrote that story had any solution for the problem that could be applied to my case, I was strong for him. Since, I have missed but few numbers of *THE ARGOSY*, this being due to the news-stands running out of it before I got around. I am moving most of the time, and have to depend upon the news-stands instead of a regular subscription. In all the country there is not a bunch of authors that hand out as much pleasure as *THE ARGOSY* writers, and I have no criticism to make on any of them.

C. L. EDWARDS.

YOUR FAVORITE STORY

Here you are, readers, a letter that opens the way for a flow of opinions from you on more than one topic. After all, not the length, but the strength of a story is the thing, and I do not believe in hampering the author by rules and regulations when genius burns. A good idea this of Mr. Padgett's as to what story each reader liked best. I'm waiting to hear from you.

Andalusia, Alabama.

I enclose herewith one dollar for my renewal. *THE ARGOSY* is the best ever, and only one thing would cause me to quit reading it, and that would be to make it a weekly publication instead of monthly. I do not have time to read a weekly magazine, for I recently tried that on the *All-Story Weekly*, beginning with the opening chapters of "The Matrimaniac." This story was good, and I read it all, but haven't had time to read the other stories in the copies that I bought.

I want to entreat you to quit drawing the serials out so long. Please change your mode of printing them back to the old style of three instalments each, divided into three parts. Three serials each month, with one going out and a new one coming in in each issue is, in my estimation, a much better way than the present method. I realize that the serials hold subscribers, but the suggestion I have offered will not interfere with this, and will give the readers the entire serial while the first part is still fresh in their memory. The present method of drawing a serial out from five to seven months is objectionable, because when the last is reached, the first is too far away and is not clearly remembered. Please take a vote on this, and see if the majority of your readers do not prefer serials in three instalments.

I would like to know through the Log-Book just what story each reader liked best. That is,

just what story fitted in and reminded them of some part of their life. I liked "The Third Act" better than any other, for the reason that it almost completely followed a certain chapter of my life. Hoping that you don't forget to contract the serials, I am,

B. B. PADGETT.

"IT'S THE STORY THAT COUNTS"

The magic of circulation-building is explained in the simple act related in the subjoined letter. Somebody likes a certain story in *THE ARGOSY*, hands it to a friend to read, and, presto, another unit is added to the magazine's clientele. Which story in the present issue, say, do any of you consider worth recommending to a friend?

Syracuse, New York.

Please find enclosed one dollar to pay for my renewal to *THE ARGOSY*, which I have read for a long time. The first *ARGOSY* I remember reading had "A Trolley Tangle" in it, and a friend considered the story so good that the book was handed to me, and I at once became an admirer of *THE ARGOSY*. I always liked *Hawkins*, but I will abide by the decision of the majority and forget him. In regard to authors, I never notice an author's name. It's the story that counts with me, not the author. Hoping that this escapes the scrap-heap, I am,

HAROLD GUTTERSON.

THE PULL OF THE SERIAL

I especially commend the subjoined to those readers who want us to abolish serials. They are the anchor to windward that steadies circulation. Without serials, Mr. Graham would very likely have waited for the March number when he found he was too late for February.

Ukiah, California.

Enclosed find ten cent's' worth of stamps to pay for the February *ARGOSY*. I was too late to get it from the town near which I live. I think *THE ARGOSY* is about the best magazine I have read. I have not subscribed for it yet, but I intend to, later. "The Motive," "Daring the Danger Zone," and "The Gilded Trap" are very good stories, and as they are continued in the February *ARGOSY* is why I am so anxious to get it.

DIABLE C. GRAHAM.

PREFERS THE LONG SERIAL

Mr. Rich runs squarely counter to the preferences of Mr. Padgett in the matter of the length of serials. November, 1896, was the second issue of the present type of *ARGOSY*—that is to say, all fiction.

Seattle, Washington.

I have just finished reading "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn," by Perley Poore Sheehan, in the March number of *THE ARGOSY*, and I must say I think it is a crackerjack. I have read a number of novels by the same author, including "The Star of Adventure" and "Phyllis of Fountain Square"—all good, every one—but

"Four-Forty at the Fort Penn" beats them all. I call it his masterpiece.

I was thinking a few days ago while reading *THE ARGOSY* how long it had been since I first began to read it. My mind went back a good many years, when I was a sailor on the Atlantic coast. I think it was in the summer of 1883 that I first saw and read the little weekly called the *Golden Argosy*, and I think it was in November, 1896, that I read *THE ARGOSY* as a monthly. I was in Portland, Maine, at the time, and some sailor brought it aboard my ship along with other reading matter. Sailors as a rule, are very fond of reading. I read it then, and I have continued to read it ever since, and it grows better all the time.

I like your complete novels very well, but my preference is for a long serial story; the longer it is, the better it suits me. I enjoy reading the Log-Book. The different opinions given by the various readers are very interesting. I read the letters of the Log-Book first of all; then the continued stories, next the complete novel, winding up with the short stories. For the small sum of ten cents you are certainly giving your army of readers a great treat in publishing a magazine up to the standard of high-priced publications. I read all kinds of magazines, also fiction from the public library; but I get more satisfaction out of a copy of *THE ARGOSY* than from any of them.

C. E. RICH.

WANTS NO SERIALS AT ALL

Now for the man who dislikes serials, but in this case he has nullified his objection by subscribing, so that there is no danger of his missing a number. He makes *THE ARGOSY* a bit older than it is by harking back to the seventies. The first number was dated December 9, 1882. The volumes were at that time yearly ones. With the increased number of pages they were shifted to half-yearly, and when still more pages were added to each monthly issue, to three a year, as at present, in order to obviate books too bulky for easy handling.

Etna, Wyoming.

Please find enclosed two dollars, for which please renew my subscription for one year to *THE ARGOSY*, and also please send the *Railroad Man's Magazine*. I like both of these magazines. The only objection I can find to *THE ARGOSY* is too many serials. I would be better pleased if there were no serials at all, for if you miss a copy, especially if it is in the completion of a story, it is very annoying; and out in this wild country, seventy miles or more from a railroad, you can't step over to a news-stand and buy your missing copy. How any one can like serials better than complete novels, I can't imagine, as I can't remember what a serial is about from one month to the next. But in my estimation, *THE ARGOSY* is the best fiction magazine published. I have taken it now about ten years, I believe, and I have read stray copies of it since it was the *Golden Argosy* back in the seventies in old Missouri. I have never subscribed to the

Railroad Man's Magazine, but have read a good many stray copies of it.

EDWARD LEVER.

NEWS IN A NUTSHELL

Many thanks to my Georgia friend for telling so much in so few words. You will note that he mentions what he considered the best novels, his favorite short stories, and the authors that have appealed to him the most strongly. These are expressions of opinion very helpful to an editor, and matter which I am sure you all enjoy reading in the way of comparing with your own ideas.

Belton, Georgia.

Would you allow a fellow's letter to be printed in the Log-Book? I have no kicks on *THE ARGOSY* at all. I like all your stories. I think "In the Blue Limousine," "Southwest of the Law," "The Green Lamp," "The Trap Line Runners," "The Border of Blades," and "The Great White Wastes," in the April issue, best. But, in fact, I like them all. My favorite short stories that have appeared in *THE ARGOSY* lately are "And She Took Me In" and "A Ranch Secret." My favorite authors are Lenivers Carew, Seward W. Hopkins, Norcross Forbes, Rex Parson, Katharine Eggleston, George M. A. Cain, and Bedford-Jones. I am not much on the serials. I will not miss a copy of *THE ARGOSY* as long as it is as good as it is now.

Always on the good side of *THE ARGOSY*, I remain,

JAMES W. QUILLIAN.

THE MATTER OF SHORT STORIES

Tell me, readers, how many of you hail with joy the sight of the contents page when it proclaims that there are ten short stories in the number in place, say, of five or six? That means, of course, that either the complete novel is shorter or that there are not such long instalments of the serials. The more short stories, of course the more variety; but how many of you stop to think about this, I wonder? To comply with Mr. Torrey's suggestion would limit the shorts very decidedly.

Housatonic, Massachusetts.

Enclosed please find check for a year's subscription to *THE ARGOSY*, which kindly mail to my address, beginning with the April number. Heretofore I have bought it from the news-stands, but it comes at irregular dates, and I thought I would try a year's subscription and see if it did not come on the date expected. I have not missed a copy in fifteen or eighteen years, and find no other magazine that anywhere near interests me as does the good old *ARGOSY*. I hope to read it for many more years. I must say, however, that I am greatly disappointed to have you go back to the serials. Before you cut them out I did not realize what an improvement it could be; but after having every number complete I enjoyed the reading so much more that now I am holding everything back

until it is completed, and it sometimes makes tiresome waiting. Hoping you may some time cut them down to at the most two or three part stories, I am ever and sincerely yours,
W. E. TORREY.

MAKING ARGOSY READERS

Fresh light on the manner in which ARGOSY readers are made. In view of what he says, I suppose I must count Mr. Edgerly as voting for fewer short stories.

Blue Mound, Kansas.

A neighbor who was moving away gave me several ARGOSYS for the latter months of the year 1899. I read them and became a permanent reader with the January number of 1900, and during these nearly seventeen years I have never missed a number nor a story, and in all these years I have never found a poor story in THE ARGOSY except the *Hawkins* stuff. That was certainly rotten. I think that the book-length stories are infinitely better than the short ones, and I wish there were more of them. I save the magazines until I have all of a serial story, then I read it as I would a book in one or two evenings. That way is far more satisfactory to me.

I take seven other magazines, but none fills the place that THE ARGOSY does for good, clean, interesting fiction. I find very many interesting letters in the Log-Book, and you may publish this if you wish.

L. C. EDGERLY.

THE BEST STORY

Here's an early response to my request in the April Log for readers to tell me what they considered the best story they had read in THE ARGOSY. "The Land of the Central Sun," by Park Winthrop, is not out in book form.

Quincy, Illinois.

I just purchased THE ARGOSY for April, and turned to the back pages to the Log-Book as I have always done since the Log-Book has been printed. I saw a letter from A. B., telling of the best short story in THE ARGOSY. The best story I ever read in THE ARGOSY was a serial which began in the July number of 1902. It was "The Land of the Central Sun," and that story has kept me buying THE ARGOSY every month since, and I do not intend to miss one as long as I live, and I know that my son and daughter will do likewise. I know full well my old friend A. B. will want to know the best short story I have read in THE ARGOSY. Now, my kind friend A. B., I have no choice. They are all *good, good, good*. Will you please let me know if "The Land of the Central Sun" is published in book form, and where I can purchase it?

C. G. MORROW.

"A RANCH SECRET" WINS FOR HIM

This is fine—having my readers answer so promptly the questions I ask. Here is another

reply to my desire to know the best short story. Mr. Peck will be delighted to hear that the complete novel for August will be by Seward W. Hopkins.

Lake Providence, Louisiana.

I am a regular bookworm, and have been a regular reader of THE ARGOSY ever since it was first published. I have always thought that the complete novels and serials were the best, as it gives the author a chance to deepen the plot and explain it in a more satisfactory manner. This don't prevent me from reading and enjoying the short stories. In your April number you ask what is the best short story. In my opinion "A Ranch Secret," by Seward W. Hopkins, is about the best I ever read. If it had been written as a serial, it could have filled one hundred pages or more of interesting reading and made the author famous. I hope yet to read a long story by the writer. I read nearly all the best magazines, but I like THE ARGOSY best of all.

D. F. PECK.

WEST AND NORTH TO THE FORE

Here's a case of off again on again with THE ARGOSY. Possibly I can arrange for a serial of England in the long ago. A new story of the North is now under way, and I have in stock a fresh one by Raymond Spears.

Canterbury, Connecticut.

I was reading THE ARGOSY in the year 1909, I think, when the magazine was bound in yellow covers; but the stories did not suit me. In my opinion they all seemed to be in the same vein, so I did not buy it long. After a year or so my brother brought home a copy that he got from a neighbor. The complete novel was entitled "Waters of Strife," by H. Bedford-Jones, and all of the stories were good, and I have not missed a copy since. In the same issue was a serial story of England. Give us some more stories by H. Bedford-Jones, also a serial about England of the long ago. I like Western stories and stories of the North. Give us a good Western serial. Keep the authors busy—Katharine Eggleston, G. W. Ogden, R. Spears. I have no fault to find with THE ARGOSY. Better than ever at ten cents per copy.

EDGAR H. PARKHURST.

A FINE THREE MONTHS' SCORE

THE ARGOSY is certainly making a great 1917 record with its novels. The January "Southwest of the Law" set the ball rolling with a perfect chorus of praise. February followed hard on its heels with an avalanche of good things said about "The Blue Limousine," and now "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn," in March, is scoring heavily. The author of "The Man With the 44 Chest" was E. J. Rath.

Hazelwood, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for a number of years, and I want to say it is the best

magazine I have read. Just finished "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn," by Perley Poore Sheehan. It was surely great. I think the author means the Fort Pitt Hotel instead of Fort Penn. It is opposite Pennsylvania Station. The first copy of THE ARGOSY I read was "The Man With the 44 Chest"—I forget the author's name—but it surely was a great tale. Hoping this passes the waste-basket, I remain,

ARTHUR MASON.

WHAT SETTLED THE BUSINESS?

A sprained ankle set this man to reading THE ARGOSY. How about somebody having been won to it by seeing an attractive cover-picture on the news-stand? Are there any such? I pause for a reply.

Southworth, Washington.

Enclosed you will find one dollar for a year's subscription to THE ARGOSY. You wanted to know how the readers got acquainted with the magazine. In August, 1913, I was laid up with a sprained ankle. A friend loaned me two ARGOSYS, and that settled the business. Have never missed a single number since. Have paid from ten to twenty cents for it, and would gladly pay the twenty cents again. I enjoy every one of your book-length novels, also the serials. Just finished "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn." It certainly is grand. Also just finished the serial, "The Motive." This, to my mind, is the best I have read for a long time. "The Blue Limousine" was a crackerjack.

Have always bought at the news-stands, but as I have now to go ten miles to get it, will subscribe. If this goes in the Log-Book, please use only initials.

P. S.

P. S.—Have no choice of your authors. They are all good. Long live THE ARGOSY, the best fiction magazine that is printed to-day.

NO TEST NEEDED

The letter below is another of the sort I am glad to get, as it gives me some illuminating ideas of the readers' tastes and preferences. Mr. Lease and other Jackson fans will be glad to know that Fred has come back. I have two long stories from his typewriter now in the safe awaiting publication.

Seattle, Washington.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for so long that I have lost track of the exact date of the first magazine, though I well remember the story that started me as a steady reader. I found an old ARGOSY in a cabin in Lewistown, Montana, and started reading it. The story was "The King of Arcadia." I do not remember the author's name, but from that time till now I have not missed a single copy. I have no kick on any of the stories, though some are better than others. "The Desert Crucible," "The Trap Line Runners," "Gold Grabbers," "Waters of Strife," all three of the *John Solomon* stories, and "The Clutch of Siberia" (October, 1912), are, to my notion, the best stories that you have published. Of the authors, I like H.

Bedford-Jones, Zane Grey, Perley Poore Sheehan, William Wallace Cook, Stephen Brandish, and Fred Jackson; but best of all Zane Grey. He knows his West as few authors know it.

I am not writing this as a test to see if the Log-Book is a fake or not, as I had one letter printed some three or four years ago, and I am sure that if mine was printed, the others are from readers of your wonderful magazine.

A delighted reader,

F. N. LEASE.

A PATRIOTIC NOTE

I am very glad to give space to the following eulogy on the patriotic little tale that closed our April number. It appeared at a timely date, and I assure Mrs. L. that I deeply appreciate her good words for it.

Washington, District of Columbia.

Much as I like THE ARGOSY, the Log is to me the most interesting; but your last number (April) contains a gem by Kenneth Rossiter, "What He Could Do," and is worthy of the vignette of the old soldier saving the flag from desecration by the vandals who would destroy it—a picture which should be carried by every patriotic man in his pocket and be in the scrap-book of every woman who loves the flag and the nation. The dear old veteran saves the flag under which he had the honor to fight in the perils of 1861—the dear old soldier going through life so patient and silent, and willing again to give his life for his country. The story is a pretty one and well told by the author. I never read one better, and I congratulate him on its success. It is not necessary to publish my name.

K. K. L.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

Danella Paine, Queen, Nevada, and R. L. Albin, Lotus, Illinois, in sending yearly subscriptions both use exactly the same phrase to the effect that they do not want to miss a number. The latter has taken the magazine for twelve years and the former since old enough to read. J. A. Ross, Gualala, California, also subscribing, explains that he is forty miles from the nearest railroad, and, as he cannot get along without THE ARGOSY, sends the money in advance. Acknowledgment is made to "Jim," Port Norfolk, Virginia, for his very flattering tribute in verse. F. P. Aleshire, Craig, Colorado, thinks THE ARGOSY the best magazine in the world, but it is hard to get at Craig without missing some of the numbers, so he subscribes. Clarence E. Race, Denver, Colorado, found "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn" as interesting and exciting as a horse-race. R. S., New York City, is informed that we are constantly looking for fiction. There is always room in THE ARGOSY for the new writer who has a good story to tell and knows how to start it off with a punch in the very first sentence.



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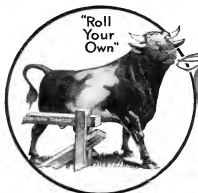
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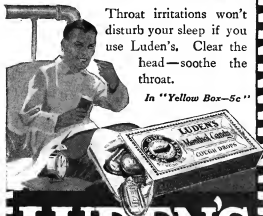
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